

In defense of jason compson iv



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say. I says you're lucky if her playing out of school is all that worries you. I says she ought to be down there in that kitchen right now, instead of up there in her room, gobbing paint on her face and waiting for six niggers that cant even stand up out of a chair unless they've got a pan full of bread and meat to balance them, to fix breakfast for her. And Mother says, (113) In a harsh, sarcastic voice of insolence, Jason's section roars off to a start that immediately distances itself from the first two. No longer in the incoherent worlds of an idiot and suicidal youngster, the ensuing monologue seemingly marks a return to some form of sanity. But the fluent discourse does little to help the reader decipher the troubling mind of this relentless villain. His discrepancies between thought and action portray a man helplessly lost in a world he foolishly believes to comprehend. His reiteration of " Like I say once a bitch always a bitch" at the end of his speech shows a man out of touch with a tangible world, consumed by a past he has no control over. He thus emerges as a tortured torturer; a sarcastic man who himself is the object of satire. For he is as much a part of the familial madness as Benjy and Quentin forever a Compson, doomed from the beginning. Jason's character is completely abominable. The gross lack of respect he displays towards anything and anybody doesn't leave a singular opportunity to view him in positive light. Most overtly seen in his reduction of people into bigoted orders, his thoughts repulse the reader from an attempted bounding with him. No group is safe from his blind rancor; not even small-townners, old maids, and preachers are spared from his verbal lashings (154-155). Even the swallows are prey (155). As a proud Southerner he has a place in his black heart against Yankees, Jews (120, 121, 147), college professors (156), and foreigners: But I'll be damned if it hasn't come

to a pretty pass when any damn foreigner that can't make a living in the country where God put him, can come to this one and take money right out of an American's pockets (121). Not surprisingly the two groups he deals with the most, women and blacks, are especially prone to his indifferent scrutiny (his entire section is sample enough). In similar fashion, he typecasts every member of his family, dehumanizing each so that they become nothing more than repugnant objects to him: his father is an alcoholic; mother a fussy neurotic; brother a drooling idiot; sister and niece harlots. With each cutting remark Jason reaffirms his superior notion of himself, leaving the reader in a state of aversion. If Jason's inner thoughts disgust, his conspicuous actions only serve to enrage. Bitterness and irony envelop each of his social encounters; he doesn't offer one kind word or gesture to anybody, not even to those who presumably deserve it (i. e. the sheriff, his boss, or mother). So too he foolishly induces conflict in perfectly harmless situations. Over and over he tries to get fired by kindhearted Earl and knocks his fellow investors despite their attempts to befriend him. In his most blatant exhibition of provocation, Jason's senselessly assaults the old man (while in pursuit of Quentin), all but convincing the reader of his inherent evil (192-93). And the maniacal manner in which his life is dictated by money only furthers the reader's disgust. Attempting to procure social rank, he seeks financial gain by any possible means. But not surprisingly, his honest endeavors at doing so are complete failures. Compulsively bad at the stock market ("I just want an even chance to get my money back") and stuck with meager pay as a menial salesclerk, Jason stoops to a unforeseen low by robbing young Quentin of \$40,000 not once questioning its integrity. He executes this elaborate scheme with criminal pleasure, enjoying every

step of the process, from his forgery to his mother's burning of the fake check and ultimately to his obsessive counting of the plunder. It becomes quite obvious that people have no place in his heart, but money most certainly does. Yet all of these shocking traits are drastically overshadowed by the perverse pleasure Jason derives from his own depravity. An evident change in voice and demeanor is clearly seen when he merely suggests inflicting pain. His tone escalates to a new level of haughtiness when he nobly states that the only way to manage women is to "keep them guessing. If you can't think of any other way to surprise them, give them a bust in the jaw" (122). But seeing others writhe in anguish (specifically anguish he creates) seems to most arouse this state of childlike glee. He recounts his imposed castration of Benjy without reservation, proudly asserting that it was the right thing to do even if the idiot didn't have a clue what he was doing (164-65). His unyielding treatment of Quentin displays this sadistic quality as well. Whether it be through verbal degradation, display of physical strength, meticulous torture of her mind and spirit (161-62), or all-out pursuit, Jason takes pleasure in making her life a living hell. The scene with the concert tickets appropriately demonstrates his shocking mind (158-59). Sensing a window of opportunity when Luster utters, "Wish I could go (I could if I jes had a quarter)", Jason seizes the chance to wreak agony. Knowing full well that the "nigger boy" will not be able to furnish a single penny (and with no real need for such a small amount of money), he ruthlessly leads the servant into believing he will give away the ticket. But instead of giving the free ticket to Luster, whose family he drastically underpays, he gleefully taunts the boy, demanding a nickel for compensation. When nothing is produced, he smoothly drops the passes into the stove and exits the room;

not even giving thought to what he just did. This scene, coupled with his unbelievable disregard for Caddy and her desire to see her babe (127-29), solidifies the reader's opinion of Jason as an outright asshole. One could too easily end their assessment of character at this juncture. But simply discarding Jason as a reckless misanthrope is as foolish as his own reducing of peoples into narrow categories. For while the reader deciphers a great deal from his overt thoughts and actions, just as much is to be learned from what he chooses not to recognize)namely the trauma of his past and futility of his present. By examining these problems, new perspective is shed on his identity. Serving not as justifications for his actions, but rather as means to understanding them, they dramatically shift our response to this "villain". Jason's inability to connect with his past should be easily recognizable in light of the first two sections. Whereas Benjy and Quentin are totally captivated by "yesterday", Jason does not significantly delve into old times, save the memory of his father's funeral. Despite this absence, his reiteration of Mrs. Compson's "Because you are a Bascomb, except in name" (in one form or another) and obsession with money sound suspiciously familiar to themes revealed in the first chapter. Indeed, a closer examination of Benjy's tale discloses the import of Jason's past on his present. An intense identity complex mars Jason's childhood. Benjy's recollections of Jason overwhelmingly endorse this)he is not an exuberantly innocent youth, but rather a detached soul who finds no comfort in the familial realm. Much of his isolation stems from Mrs. Compson's dedication to an extinct philosophy and her conceited efforts to mold him. Believing that she failed as a mother to the first three children (which she did), she inflects all her maternal "disknowledge" upon Jason. This "disknowledge" roots itself in the notion

that a family's ultimate duty is to possess a prestigious position in the social hierarchy. The irony here is, of course, that her own heritage ranks below the that of her spouse, Mr. Compson, who could care less about the issue. And since her first two competent children disdain her and her beliefs, Jason becomes the last possible outlet for her delusion to become reality. She prescribes him to denounce his namesake (even though he bears the legacy of his father) and accept an idealized version of what family should be. To ensure this she removes him from the family circle; he sleeps in the same bed as Damuddy and is constantly told that he is the only good Compson. He naivete occasion blind adherence. Yet Mrs. Compson is not the sole reason for Jason's separation; the other members of the family treat him as an outsider from the beginning, typecasting him a counterpart for their his mother. In a chapter filled with the persistent wailing of a mental incompetent (who is more often than not comforted by his family in his youth), there is a surprising repetition of " Jason cried". Only Jason's cries are greeted with a " hush up" or " shut up" from Dilsey, " do you want to whip you again" (44) from Mr. Compson, ridicule from Caddy, and total silence from his mother. Reaching out for some kind of attention, he receives none and further alienates himself from the clan. Caddy displays the most audacious behavior towards her youngest brother. She completely severs bonds with him by disparaging any statement he makes (24), provoking him to tattle (when he has no intentions to) (13), and cruelly mocking the loss of his one protector:" Do you think buzzards are going to undress Damuddy." Caddy said. " You're crazy." " You're a skizzard." Jason said. He began to cry." You're a knobnot." Caddy said. Jason cried. His hands were in his pockets. (23)The reader now sees the dire consequences of these actions;

Jason seeks refuge from this hate by entering his mother's world, returning his hands to his pockets. The combination of these situations has a damning effect on Jason's life. Since he never obtains love from Mrs. Compson (she loves the ideal over him) or the rest, he seeks comfort through the physical procurement of money. By doing so he places himself in complete control of his own destiny and still maintains the ideals he accepted as a child. The only time he exits this solitary mode is to accept a job Caddy's marriage produces. But the ensuing fallout destroys what little faith he had in allegiance and instigates his vengeful torment of the world, in particular Quentin. He completely abandons empathy in the process, constructing walls that permanently block off human attachment. It is this image of a man, dominated by money yet void of feeling, which emerges as the reader's Jason. He approaches life with a chip on his shoulder, loudly proclaiming, "I'm Jason Compson. See if you can stop me" (190). The reader cannot help but sympathize with the confused character. Utter futility becomes the cornerstone of Jason's existence, as prophetically mentioned by Job: "You fools a man whut so smart he cant even keep up wid hisself" (156). His life is a farcical disaster. The fortune he fought for is mockingly modest, his name carries a miserly connotation, and he is head of the household he tried so hard to abandon) "caring" for the bastard daughter of a sister who screwed him. Worst of all, he is entirely alone and unaware of his own emotion; he can only feel "funny" at his father's funeral (127). The rigid barriers of degradation have become permanently etched on his persona, never again able to perceive life in positive light. He is a crazy hypocrite, unaware of who he is or how he got there. Jason is a part of each reader. All of us exhibit his tendencies at some point, yet we recoil from his character to prevent the

shock of recognition. While Benjy's incompetent outlook easily grasps our sympathy and Quentin earns our love in his hopeless confusion, Jason's baseness is harder to see through. Only after investigation do we reluctantly accept Jason in correlation with his brothers. This lengthy process of familiarization heightens the reader's affinity towards him—a victim of Circumstance and tragic survivor.