

SparkNotes analysis of the Jason Section

Source: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/soundfury/section3.rhtml>

Summary

I wouldn't lay my hand on her. The bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother's life everyday and make my name a laughing stock in the town. I wont do anything to her.

It is the morning of Good Friday, 1928, the day before Benjy's narration takes place. Jason Compson is in the Compson house, fighting with his mother and with his niece, Miss Quentin. Jason thinks back on his family and his own personal history. His sister Caddy's marriage to Herbert Head crumbled in 1911, when it became apparent to Herbert that Caddy's unborn child was not his. Mrs. Compson refused to take Caddy in, but Mr. Compson and Dilsey saw to it that the family took in Caddy's child, Miss Quentin. Jason assumed control of the household when Mr. Compson died of alcoholism. Herbert Head had offered Jason a job at his bank, but rescinded that offer when he divorced Caddy. This retraction left Jason no choice but to work at the local farm-supply store. Though Mrs. Compson hopes Jason will own the store one day, Jason is bitter about having lost his bank job and having been forced to work in the farm-supply store.

Now in his mid-thirties, Jason has grown into a devious and mean-spirited man. He has concocted an elaborate scheme to pocket the money Caddy sends him to support Miss Quentin's upbringing. Mrs. Compson's poor eyesight and blind love for Jason have prevented her from detecting his scheme. So far, Jason has stolen nearly fifty thousand dollars from his sister and niece over the course of fifteen years. He uses this extra money to play the cotton market and to pay for a prostitute in Memphis. Caddy is the only one who distrusts Jason and suspects that he is scheming.

The seventeen-year-old Miss Quentin is a headstrong, rebellious, and somewhat promiscuous girl who frequently skips school. Jason constantly argues with Mrs. Compson and Miss Quentin over what should be done with Miss Quentin and how she should be treated. Jason threatens and insults Miss Quentin and nearly beats her with his belt until Dilsey, as always, intervenes. Jason is finally forced to let Miss Quentin go, but makes a snarling promise that things are not yet settled between them.

Jason returns to his unfulfilling job at the farm-supply store and finds four letters, including one from Caddy and one from Uncle Maury. Jason recalls his father's funeral, after which he agreed to look after Miss Quentin as long as Caddy stayed away and

continued to send money. The letter from Caddy contains a money order for Miss Quentin rather than the customary check. This turn of events throws a wrench in Jason's scheme, as Miss Quentin will have to sign the money order before it can be cashed. However, when Miss Quentin comes in to collect her money, Jason bullies her into thinking that the money order is for a mere ten dollars. He forces Miss Quentin to sign it without looking at the amount and sends her on her way.

Back at the Compson house for dinner, Jason barely tolerates his mother's self-pitying melodrama and the annoying sight of his idiot brother Benjy. Jason is deeply embarrassed about Benjy and wants to send him to the mental hospital in Jackson as soon as possible. After returning to work, Jason argues with his boss, Earl, about how long he can take for his dinner break. Earl accuses Jason of having stolen money from his mother to pay for his car. Several moments later, while Jason is in the back room tormenting Earl's black assistant, he sees Miss Quentin go by with a man wearing a red tie. Jason chases after them through the back alleys of Jefferson. He is interrupted by a boy with a telegram, who tells Jason that his account in the cotton market is significantly down.

Jason angrily goes home, and, driving back into town, is nearly run down by a Ford driven by the man with the red tie. Jason chases the Ford and looks for Miss Quentin and the man in some underbrush. He gets out, hoping to catch Miss Quentin red-handed with the man. Jason suddenly hears their car start and blow its horn. He runs back to his car and finds that Miss Quentin and the man have let the air out of one of his tires.

Jason makes it back to town, finishes his day at work, and returns home. Luster tells Jason that Miss Quentin and Mrs. Compson are upstairs fighting, and that Dilsey is trying to keep the peace. Luster wants to go to the minstrel show very badly and tells Jason he needs a quarter to buy a ticket. Jason has two tickets that he does not want, but he knows Luster does not have any money, so he burns up the two tickets in the stove while Luster watches.

Jason goes inside and Dilsey serves dinner. Jason does not explicitly mention that he saw Miss Quentin with the man in the red tie, but alludes to it indirectly several times. Miss Quentin angrily asks Mrs. Compson why Jason is always so hostile to her, and claims that she misbehaves because Jason has made her that way. Miss Quentin goes up to her room to study, but Jason suspects that she plans to sneak out of the house.

Analysis

Faulkner sets the tone of Jason's section from the first sentence: "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say." Jason has grown into a petty, sadistic, and bitter man, and we see that the form of his narrative reflects this hardened mind. Jason's narrative is clear, precise, swift, and almost completely emotionless. His clarity helps reveal several key plot details that the two previous sections have merely implied. Jason confirms that Benjy has been castrated, that Quentin drowned himself, and that Caddy was divorced. However, though a relief after the chaotic stream of consciousness of Benjy's and Quentin's narratives, Jason's section is ultimately disturbing in its clear depiction of the hatred and cruelty with which Jason runs the Compson family.

Though cunning and clever, Jason does not put his talents to good use. Instead, he succumbs to his own hatred and wallows in a sense of victimization. He resents Caddy for costing him the job at Herbert's bank, but fails to appreciate the fact that without Caddy he would never have been offered the job in the first place. The simple wickedness Jason displayed as child has intensified in his adulthood. He takes pleasure in tormenting everyone around him and takes strength from a conviction that, because he has been wronged, he is always right.

Considering that Jason is the new head of the Compson household, the family truly has sunk to an unfathomable low. Whereas his grandfather was a Civil War general and his great-grandfather the governor of Mississippi, Jason works as a clerk in a farm-supply store and steals from his own family. He is hardly of the same material as the ancestors who built up the family name. Ironically, however, Jason is the only one of the Compson children to win Mrs. Compson's love. Jason abuses his mother's trust, using it to blind her to the fact that he is stealing large sums of money from her. It is unclear why Mrs. Compson favors Jason so much, but perhaps it is because he shares Mrs. Compson's tendencies toward misery and self-pity much more than the other children.

Jason is not bothered by failing to live up to his ancestors' greatness because he is completely unconcerned with the past. Unlike Benjy and Quentin, Jason is wholly focused on the present and on manipulating the present for future personal gain. He does recall past events, but only concentrates on the effect those events have on him here and now. Jason dwells on Caddy's divorce, for example, only because it has left him in a menial and unfulfilling job. However, despite Jason's constant attempts to twist present circumstances to his own benefit, he does not really have any aspirations. He maintains

overwhelming greed, selfishness, and focus on future gain, but does not use these to work toward any higher goal. Jason is all motivation with virtually no ambition.