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In life, everybody is bound by time; nobody can escape it. At some point in their lives, everyone feels trapped, whether it be by society's expectations, unplanned obstacles, or even time itself. William Faulkner's The Wild Palms follows the separate stories of The Wild Palms, a tale of love about almost doctor Harry Wilbourne and his mistress Charlotte Rittenmeyer, and Old Man, the gripping adventure of a convict and a woman he rescued from a flood. This beautifully written novel spectacularly impacts the reader, leaving them satisfied and filled with a deeper appreciation for the timeless themes.

Faulkner is known by many for his use of the stylistic tool of stream-of-consciousness. He uses this tool primarily in The Wild Palms to give the reader insight into the thoughts of Harry, with the exception of the first and ninth chapters in which Faulkner uses it to express the thoughts of the doctor/landlord next door. The use of stream-of-consciousness truly enhances the story, giving the reader a more complete connection to the characters. On pages 28-9, Harry's roommate Flint attempts to persuade him to go to a party on his twenty-seventh birthday as opposed to staying home like he planned. Here, the reader sees as Harry reasons with himself, "Now he did begin to think *Why not? Why really not?* and now he could almost see the guardian of the old trained peace and resignation rise to arms, . . . not alarmed, . . . interdicting: *No. You will not go. Let well enough alone. You have peace now; you want no more."* Everyone has felt the pressure to do something that deep down they know they should not do, and they have experienced an internal battle similar to this. As Harry spends more time with Charlotte, he begins to notice things about her that he finds discomforting and disheartening. "*She's worse off than I am* he [thinks]. *She doesn't even know what it is to hope"* (Faulkner 76). Coming to this realization distresses Harry. It makes him realize that their relationship is doomed to fail and within Charlotte lies a part of her that never can and never will love him. Seeing Harry in these situations makes his character more relatable and realistic, causing the reader to connect to him more completely.

In the minimal dialogue in Old Man, Faulkner uses colloquialism and the diction of the South very effectively. With the combined use of these literary devices, the reader receives a deeper insight into the characters through their speech. When the tall convict first rescues the woman, she asks him to bring the boat closer because she has "'taken a right sharp strain getting up'" (Faulkner 124) into the tree. From this statement, the reader infers that the woman may not be particularly well educated. The reader arrives at the same conclusion about the convict when he informs the woman that "'[He] dont know even know where [he] used to be. Even if [he] knowed which way was north, [he] wouldn’t know if that was where [he] wanted to go'" (Faulkner 126). Faulkner uses these tools just enough to convey their purpose without impairing or slowing reading rate.

In both The Wild Palms and Old Man, Faulkner uses the literary device of irony to express some of the more unexpected happenings in the stories. The most prominent example of this device in the story of Harry and Charlotte occurs when their affair officially begins. They meet at the train station to leave for Chicago, but when Harry "peer[s] out the window as the train slow[s] into the Carrollton Avenue station", he realizes "They [are] both there, the husband and the wife" (Faulkner 43). The last thing the reader, or Harry, expects is for Charlotte's husband to escort her to the station. The reader must feel some sense of sympathy for the husband, Rat, who turns his wife over to another man as well as Harry who must feel exceedingly uncomfortable in this situation. In contrast, the use of irony in Old Man, stems from the tall convict wanting nothing else in the world but to find "something flat to leave the woman on until he could find an officer, a sheriff" (Faulkner 137) and turn himself in. The reader expects the convict to be elated to be free, but he wants exactly the opposite. He wants to be back at the work farm where he knows what to do and when; the free world holds too much uncertainty for him. The use of irony in these stories enhance the unlikely happenings in this novel.

Sensual imagery serves as the most prominent literary device used by Faulkner in this novel. He uses smell, sound, touch, taste, and sight to bring the reader further into the stories. When Harry arrives at the party that Flint persuades him to go to, he notices "a heavy smell of jasmine which seem[s] to lie visible upon the rich stagnant air already filled with the smell of sugar and bananas and hemp from the docks, like inert wisps of fog or even paint" (Faulkner 29). Even for a person who has never smelled all of these scents, especially at once, this is a very strong image, but for someone who has smelled each of these things, the scent is almost overwhelming. Throughout he Wild Palms, Faulkner repeatedly references "the wild dry clashing of the palms" (Faulkner 243). When reading this, the reader vividly hears the sounds of dry palm fronds colliding in the wind. The sensory imagery continues when the tall convict begins hunting alligators with the Cajun, without a shirt. After only one day, "his naked back [is] blistered and scoriated like so much beef" (Faulkner 216). This cringe-worthy description of the convict's sunburn pains anyone who has had a severe sunburn. After the botched abortion, Charlotte experiences intense pain and bites her lip to the point of drawing blood. When the paramedics take her away, Harry "kne[els] beside the bed; she stop[s] her head now; her lips lay still under his for a moment, hot and dry to the taste, with the thin sweetish taste of the blood" (Faulkner 238-39). Everyone has tasted blood at some point or another. Everyone knows that metallic, but sweet, unpleasant taste. When reading this, the reader experiences this taste with Harry; they feel it on their tongue. Finally, Faulkner uses visual imagery to enhance the reader's involvement. When the tall convict finally finds land and spots officers, he runs toward them and watches as "the machine gun, the blunt thick muzzle slant[s] and drop[s] and probe[s] toward him and he still screaming in his hoarse crow's voice, 'I want to surrender!' . . . continuing to scream even as he whirl[s] and plunge[s] splashing, ducking" (Faulkner 143-44). During this moment in the book, the reader sees the machine gun as the convict sees it and experiences his horror as the officers shoot at him while he attempts to surrender and bring the woman to safety before she gives birth. Through vivid imagery, Faulkner bring the reader closer to the characters and immerses them deeper into the story.

Characterization comes in several forms in The Wild Palms; Faulkner uses dialogue, thoughts of the characters, character actions, and detailed physical descriptions. As discussed before, Faulkner uses colloquial diction of the South to supplement the characters of the tall convict and the woman and stream-of-consciousness to give the reader access to Harry's thoughts. Faulkner depicts Charlotte as quite rough with Harry like when she gets "into the cot with him, as heedless of the hard and painful elbow which jab[s] him . . . as she [is] of the painful hand which grasp[s] his hair and [shakes] his head with savage impatience" (Faulkner 96-7). These action by Charlotte show that this couple definitely does not have a perfect, gooey relationship, but a slightly abrasive one. Faulkner excels at vivid physical descriptions of his characters, a perfect example of which can be found on page 18 of the tall convict: "One of them was about twenty-five, tall, lean, flat-stomached, with a sunburned face and Indian-black hair and pale, china-colored outraged eyes." This detailed description gives the reader a crystal clear image of the protagonist of Old Man and leaves little question of his appearance. Faulkner employs varied and efficient methods of characterization throughout this novel which connect the reader to the characters more completely.

Several important themes appear in The Wild Palms. The two most prominent and connected of these being that everyone is bound by time and everyone desires freedom in their lives. In the story of Harry and Charlotte, on his twenty-seventh birthday, Harry feels that his life falls short of his expectations. He has studied to be a doctor like his father before him and he has always lived his life the way people want him to. This realization serves as the force that compels Harry to break free from this wasted time and the burden of the expectations placed upon him and accompany Flint to the party where he meets Charlotte and six weeks later begins an affair with her. Throughout the novel, Harry constantly kicks himself for not releasing his adventurous side during his youth. He especially feels this way when he encounters troubles finding a job because he did not finish the last few months of his medical degree. Charlotte feels trapped by her marriage to Rat, who reminds her very much of her brothers, and the strain of raising two daughters. She desires excitement and passionate love without the expectations and trials of marriage. She even tells Harry, "'Listen: it's got to be all honeymoon, always'" (Faulkner 68-9). When she becomes pregnant unexpectedly, she pressures Harry to give her an abortion before the time passes that the operation can be performed. As the four month widow shrinks, the two characters feel trapped by this time constraint and the pressure of the pregnancy. The characters of Old Man also find themselves under the control of time and embark on desperate searches for freedom. For the tall convict, the role of his prison sentence serves as the most obvious constraint of time, but he also finds himself bound by the pressure to get the woman to safety before she gives birth to her child. This situation makes the convict feel trapped and brings about a deep desire to return to the farm where he knows what to expect. He feels a greater sense of freedom behind the walls of his cell than he feels in the open, free air of Mississippi. Faulkner uses his characters to communicate that everyone desires freedom in their lives, but they often feel bound and trapped by time.

The exigencies of the two stories vary drastically because of their vast contrasts. The Wild Palms takes place in 1937 in the heat of the Great Depression, but with hints of the Roaring 20s still evident in the culture. These remnants of the 20s appear in Charlotte's leaving of her husband to run off with another man. Her husband grudgingly, but willingly brings Charlotte to the train station and delivers her to Harry. He even gives Harry a check for three hundred dollars to buy the ticket home for Charlotte when and if she decides to return to him and their two young daughters. The fact that Rat remains married to Charlotte even though she leaves him serves as a tribute to the times. Charlotte tells Harry, "Rat's a Catholic. He wont give me [a divorce]" (Faulkner 39). In America today, divorce occurs commonly among just about every religion, so the fact that Rat refuses to give Charlotte one shows the time of the work. The pressure of the Depression shows in the difficulty for Harry or Charlotte to hold a steady job. Throughout their story, they each go through a series of job changes and they move several times with work. Most importantly to their story, the ignorant and dangerous practice of abortion plays a prominent role in this couple's lives. During this time, abortions were considered "letting the air in" which was done by using a knife to make a small incision which often led to toxemia and death. Harry successfully completes this operation once before performing it on Charlotte, however he fails on his second attempt, killing her. The struggles that Harry and Charlotte encounter remain relevant today though, despite the time difference; affairs still happen, unplanned pregnancies still occur and cause turmoil, and people still struggle with money and job security. Old Man takes place during the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927. One main distinguisher of the times is the existence of work farms as substitutes for prisons. The convicts in this story are prisoners of the Mississippi State penal farm. Today, all work farms have been replaced by prisons to keep those incarcerated under tighter hold. In the novel, the farm possesses no gates, just officers with guns who's orders are to shoot anyone trying to flee. The convict's discomfort in the free world remains relevant today though. Many convicts offend again and find themselves back in prison after they have been freed because they have trouble fitting back into the free world. Race plays an equally important role in this story. Any time the tall convict and the woman come across another person Faulkner distinguishes if the person is white or black. Today race still plays a role in description, but it does not hold the importance that it held then.

Faulkner's The Wild Palms is a wonderful novel that is well worth reading. The Wild Palms and Old Man serve as beautiful contrasts to each other. Both stories are satisfyingly well written and leave the reader with a greater appreciation for the timeless themes of the human search for freedom and the constraints of time.

Work Cited

Faulkner, William. *The Wild Palms (If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem)*. New York: Vintage Books, 1939.

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