**Children into Chattel: When Family Is Merely Property**

**Anse Bundren (Page 89)**

Erin Penner

What do you do with a man who sees in others only what he can extract from them?

Anse looks at his work-worn wife and says, “Nonsense . . . you and me aint nigh done chapping yet, with just two” (173). The reader has the eerie feeling he’s not driven by family values so much as a commercial calculation: more children means more labor for the Bundren farm. Claiming he has a medical exemption from manual labor, Anse elicits labor and goods from everyone around him. He would transform family into property: chaps into chattel.

Having missed the era of plantation slavery, Anse replicates it in his transactional, exploitative relationships with family and community members. Faulkner writes in another novel of the antebellum plantation ledgers that record “the slow outward trickle of food and two threads frail as truth and impalpable as equators yet cable-strong to bind for life them who made the cotton to the land their sweat fell on” (*Go Down, Moses*). A century after those ledger lines were inscribed, Anse is out to prove the hunger for ownership persists long after Emancipation.