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## William Faulkner and the Meaning of History

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WILLIAM FAULKNER AND THE MEANING OF HISTORY

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THESIS

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Graduate School  
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1978

WILLIAM FAULKNER AND THE MEANING OF HISTORY

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Thesis

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English at Longwood College.

by

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South Boston, Virginia

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1978

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## INTRODUCTION

There is an old proverb which states that the only sure things in this world are death and taxes. If we substitute time or history for death and society or man for taxes, then we have the only sure things in William Faulkner's fiction. These two elements comprise the heart of Faulkner's writings and all of his works revolve in some fashion around them. Stated differently, Faulkner's works evolve from the interaction of man and history, from man's attempt to understand history, and the effect it has on him as an individual.

In attempting to picture man's struggle with history, Faulkner often presents the reader with what seems to be a maze of distorted sentence structures, twisted themes, and images that reveal nothing. These complications sometimes lead to misreadings and to faulty interpretations of Faulkner's works. The key to the maze lies in a knowledge of Faulkner's concept of time and of history.

Faulkner's clearest expression of both history and man's reaction to it is contained in the novels, Absalom, Absalom! and Requiem for a Nun. In Absalom Quentin Compson tries to comprehend the past by understanding the story of Thomas Sutpen. His painful movement from the basic facts through distorted versions of the story to a recon-

struction of the past itself is fully detailed. Requiem is more directly concerned with the moral truths inherent in the past. Temple Drake, Mrs. Gowan Stevens in this novel, is forced to face responsibility, morality, and justice.

A study of these two novels should lead to an understanding of the interactions of man and history as Faulkner presents them. If this is so, then that understanding should extend to the rest of Faulkner's works providing the basis for untangling Faulkner's maze.



## ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

In his essay "From Jefferson to the World," Hyatt Waggoner stated that "Absalom, Absalom! may be taken as the key to Faulkner's career, both formally and thematically. Before it became commonplace to speak of modern man as 'in search of a soul,' Absalom defined not only the necessity but the method and controlling conditions of the search."<sup>1</sup> Cleanth Brooks says that Absalom, Absalom! ". . . the greatest of Faulkner's novels, is probably the least well understood of all his books."<sup>2</sup> So Absalom, Absalom! is the key to Faulkner's works, but it is an extremely difficult key to use.

A great deal of the difficulty inherent in Absalom, Absalom! grows out of the fact that the novel tells two stories simultaneously. The two stories, that of Thomas Sutpen and his grand design and that of Quentin Compson and his struggle to find meaning in the Sutpen chronicle, are inextricably intermingled. This factor is an outgrowth of Faulkner's concept of the existence of the past in the present.

The difficulty of the novel extends into the sphere of analysis and criticism. For it is almost impossible to talk of one story without commenting on the other, to deal with one level of meaning without being drawn into other

levels. Yet a clear understanding of the work demands that areas of the novel or levels of meaning be isolated for examination. Among these areas are Faulkner's concept of history, Quentin's struggle to find meaning in the past, the reconstruction process, and finally, the meaning that Quentin finds in that story. Since all of the other areas and much of the difficulty in the novel evolve from Faulkner's concept of the past, that is the logical place to begin.

At the heart of Faulkner's view of the past or history is the idea that an act is never without consequences. The consequences move from their source outward to infinity, influencing all of our situations and subsequent reactions. Faulkner presents this picture of the past in the following passage of Absalom, Absalom!:

Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm . . . 3

That pebble and those ripples make up the past or history. The fact that the ripples continue pool after pool indicates a certain changelessness or an endless repetition of the consequences of past events. At the very least, it points toward a pressure exerted on the pools of the present by the

ripples of the past.

The never-ending, all-pervading quality of the past is quite evident in Thomas Sutpen's story. His putting aside of his Spanish wife was the pebble thrown into the pool. The ripples spread outward through Henry, Judith, Charles, Clytemnestra, Ellen Coldfield, Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Coldfield, Charles' mistress, Charles Etienne, Wash and his granddaughter, and finally to the idiot, Jim Bond. However, the ripples do not confine themselves to lines of direct descent. General Compson and Jason Compson are both affected to some degree by Sutpen's pebble. And the final, present ripple touches Quentin, who, through his reconstruction of the Sutpen chronicle, is faced with the horrifying meaning of the events.

It has been noted that almost all the action in the novel is presented in the form of tableaux. That is, the action is presented as a picture frozen in a frame for minute examination. I think the tableaux correspond to the pool imagery presented by Faulkner in the previously quoted passage. For like the pools waiting to be moved by the ripples from the pebble, these tableaux are situations waiting for the action to be influenced by the pressures from the past.

The fact that the past cannot be denied is evident in the way that Quentin is moved almost forcibly from indifference to the past at the beginning of the novel to an obsession with it at the end. The pressure from the past is

so great that he cannot resist it, and since it cannot be resisted, it must be faced. It can be faced only by discovering the meaning inherent in the events that caused the pressures. The fact that Shreve, a complete outsider, can participate in the reconstruction indicates that the ripples from the past have a universal quality that includes all mankind. This universality is further emphasized by the fact that Shreve can merge his identity with the other characters in the novel.

Faulkner's picture of the past as presented in Absalom, Absalom! is consistent with statements that he made to various interviewers. In a 1952 interview with Loic Bouvard, a French graduate student at Princeton, Faulkner said that he agreed with Henri Bergson's theory of time. He stated this theory, or his interpretation of it, in these words: "There is only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future, and that is eternity."<sup>4</sup> Faulkner clarified this statement somewhat in an interview with Jean Stein vanden Heuvel which appeared in

The Paris Review:

I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too. The fact that I have moved my characters in time successfully, at least in my own estimation, proves to me my own theory that time is a fluid condition that has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as WAS--only IS. If WAS existed there would be no grief or sorrow.<sup>5</sup>

There are several points in these statements that should be noted. First, Faulkner spoke of time as a condition that "has no existence except in the momentary avatars

of individual people." The key word here is individual, and what Faulkner is driving at is a statement of the idea that for the individual the past holds only that existence that the individual gives it. So that for Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson, two of the narrators in the novel, the version of the Sutpen story that they present is, for them, the true picture of the past. Secondly, Faulkner stated that there would be no grief or sorrow if the past existed. If the past existed in the present, then it would be possible to correct the mistakes or right the wrongs whose consequences cause such bafflement in the present. But the past itself does not exist in the present; only the consequences of past actions exist.

In response to a question involving the relationship of the future to the present during one of the class lectures at the University of Virginia, Faulkner stated that man's future is inherent in man himself.

That is, that's the mystical belief that there is no such thing as WAS. That time IS, and if there's no such thing as WAS, then there is no such thing as WILL BE. That time is not a fixed condition, time is in a way the sum of the combined intelligences of all men who breathe at that moment. <sup>6</sup>

Just as the past exists in the present in the form of consequences of those actions taking place in the past, so the future exists in the present as actions whose consequences will be felt in the future.

The following passage from Absalom, Absalom! will clarify this point:

Perhaps a man builds for his future in more ways than one, builds not only toward the body which will be his tomorrow or next year, but toward actions and the subsequent irrevocable courses of resultant action which his weak senses and intellect cannot foresee but which ten or twenty or thirty years from now he will take, will have to take in order to survive the act.

According to this concept each action we make in the present sets up the situations that we or our descendants will have to face in the future. The present action also limits the actions that we might make when meeting that future situation.

There is one other point in the passage from Faulkner's university lectures that should be considered. Faulkner said that time is "the sum of the combined intelligences of all men who breathe at that moment." This statement argues for the existence of what is termed racial memory or racial consciousness. Racial memory involves a vague subconscious awareness of the history or the climate of the history of the race. This factor is important as a part of the reconstruction process through which the past becomes known.

Olga Vickery points out in her essay, "The Contours of Time," that for Faulkner time is both the medium and essence of man's experience. It is objective in that it exists and functions regardless of the presence or absence of the individual man, and subjective in that its existence depends on man's awareness of it.<sup>8</sup> The subjective nature of time, the fact that time's existence depends on

man's awareness of it, pressures man for recognition. Since the future exists only in potentialities and the present is ever changing, only the past can be given recognition. This pressure often takes a form in Faulkner's novels that is similar to that pictured by Robert Penn Warren in such poems as "Original Sin: A Short Story" and "Pursuit." It involves vague feelings of guilt as if one had committed and totally forgotten some indescribably horrible crime. The guilt feelings are accompanied by a subconscious desire for punishment and expiation. The pressure from the past also results in the feeling that one's life is not one's own and that some unseen force is directing all of one's actions.

In Absalom, Absalom!, Quentin Compson is the possessor of these guilt feelings. In order to understand how they affect him and the course they force him into, one must first understand his background and his feeling for time before he is confronted by the Sutpen story.

The South that Quentin was born into had in a sense managed to stop time at some point shortly after the Civil War. The present and future were too horrible to contemplate, too void of morality and justice, so the Southerner of Quentin's time turned to the past for some form of guidance, some yardstick by which to measure his own behavior. This factor resulted in Quentin's feelings that he was caught up in the past, that at times he could not differentiate past from present. Quentin must have felt that the past had permeated his very being. The following passage

from the novel, detailing the beginning of his confrontation with the Sutpen chronicle, gives that impression.

It was a day of listening too--the listening, the hearing in 1909 mostly about that which he already knew, since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells had rung on that Sunday morning in 1833 and, on Sundays, heard even one of the original three bells in the same steeple where descendants of the same pigeons strutted and crooned or wheeled in short courses resembling soft fluid paintsmears on the soft summer sky.<sup>9</sup>

The inability to dissociate past from present leads Quentin to split into two personalities, one of which exists in the present watching the other which seems to be a spectre from the past.

Then hearing would reconcile and he would seem to listen to two separate Quentins now--the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South . . . <sup>10</sup>

There is little wonder that Quentin felt a certain impatience with the past. Evidence in the novel points to a feeling on the part of Quentin that his life was not his own, that he was merely the repository for all those who had lived and struggled and died in the past.

His childhood was full of them; his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease, waking from the fever without even knowing that it had been the fever itself which they had fought



against and not the sickness, looking with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever and into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note that Quentin had the clue here to his problem. The "stubborn back-looking ghosts" point out the way that he should look for his answers, and in one sense, he and the rest of the South were looking back with regret. For the ghosts, however, the Civil War had been the fever. For Quentin the ghosts themselves are the fever that he is fighting against and the sickness is his inability to comprehend the past.

In spite of this background and in spite of the feelings that have already been mentioned, Quentin, at first, feels no compulsion to acknowledge the past. He does feel annoyance at the fact that Miss Rosa should pick him to hear the Sutpen story. "But why tell me about it?" he complains to his father when he returns home. Later in the same passage he continues, "What is it to me that the land of the earth or whatever it was got tired of him at last and turned and destroyed him?"<sup>12</sup> At this point, Quentin seems to feel that there is nothing in the past, that the past holds no value for him. He sees the past as a "fading and ancient photograph."<sup>13</sup> The story that Miss Rosa tells him seems to be only a dream or it has the same reality that a dream has.

It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, still-born and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must de-

pend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity--horror or pleasure or amazement--depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed, and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale.<sup>14</sup>

However, in spite of the dream-like quality inherent in Miss Rosa's telling of the tale, Quentin realizes that for the tale to have any meaning, to be more than a dream, he must admit the passing of time and in a sense the existence of time.

After the talk with Miss Rosa, Quentin returns home only to hear the same story repeated by his father. Mr. Compson's version of the Sutpen chronicle, although based on the same facts, is somewhat different from that presented by Miss Rosa. It is from Mr. Compson that Quentin first learns of the problem of incest as it related to Henry and Judith. Cleanth Brooks notes in his work, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, that the problem of incest would have been especially fascinating to Quentin in the light of what we know of him from The Sound and the Fury.<sup>15</sup> Brooks dismisses this point as being relatively unimportant, but this is the factor that draws Quentin into the search for meaning in the past. Perhaps he feels that the solution to his own problems can be found if only he can understand Henry's problem.

At any rate, he can see the two of them, Henry and Bon, with a clarity that was lacking during the account by Miss Rosa.

It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see

them, facing one another at the gate. Inside the gate what was once a park now spread, unkempt, in shaggy desolation, with an air dreamy, remote and aghast like the unshaven face of a man just waking from ether, up to a huge house where a young girl waited in a wedding dress made from stolen scraps  
 . . .<sup>16</sup>

The impact of incest is evident in the passage that follows Mr. Compson's letter announcing the death of Miss Rosa. The letter itself carries Quentin back to that evening on which he and Miss Rosa traveled to Sutpen's Hundred. He remembers his feeling as he left his father's telling of the chronicle.

. . . he (Quentin) walked out of his father's talking at last because it was now time to go, not because he had heard it all because he had not been listening, since he had something which he still was unable to pass . . .<sup>17</sup>

Quentin cannot pass the incest problem that faced Henry, Bon, and Judith. It looms so large in his mind that he does not hear his father's words but concentrates instead on the image of that confrontation between Henry and Judith after Bon's death.

In the image that he sees, there is a likelihood that he projects himself and his feelings into those of Henry:

. . . that gaunt tragic dramatic self-hypnotized youthful face like the tragedian in a college play, an academic Hamlet waked from some trancement of the curtain's falling and blundering across the dusty stage from which the rest of the cast had departed last Commencement, the sister facing him across the wedding dress which she was not to use, not even to finish, the two of them slashing at one another with twelve or fourteen words and most of these the same words repeated two or three times so that when you boiled it down they did it with eight or ten.<sup>18</sup>

There are two points in this passage that are worthy of note. First, the passage itself is reminiscent of the exchange be-

tween Quentin and Caddy in The Sound and the Fury. Secondly, there are strong indications of the pressure from the past evident in the passage. The principal figure, Quentin-Henry sees himself as a tragic figure, a Hamlet. And more importantly, he sees himself as one passed by. He is the blundering creature caught up on the "dusty stage" of the past.

Quentin is in this frame of mind when he travels to Sutpen's Hundred with Miss Rosa. There he confronts Henry, and in so doing comes face to face with the past. He finds no answers here, for the past is unknowable through direct confrontation. He finds only more confusion.

. . . waking or sleeping he walked down that upper hall between the scaling walls and beneath the cracked ceiling, toward the faint light which fell outward from the last door and paused there, saying 'No. No' and then 'Only I must. I have to' and went in, . . . waking or sleeping it was the same and would be the same forever as long as he lived  
 . . . 19

The events of that trip are with him constantly, pressuring him to seek, but he does not know what he is seeking nor how he should go about finding it.

The next problem that Quentin must face is admitting the necessity of seeking in the past and knowing that the past cannot be known directly. How does one perceive the past? Hyatt Waggoner feels that ideally we must be initiated into the mysteries of the past by the old people. Although Waggoner is speaking primarily of Go Down, Moses, he notes that there is some similarity in the search of both

Quentin Compson and Ike McCaslin.

Ike comes to terms with the past as Quentin never was able to for all his probing and imagination. It is not simply that Ike listens to the voice of Sam Fathers recreating the past. It is not even that he listens so sympathetically that he comes to identify himself with the old people, though this is necessary as a preliminary to his initiation. He is first prepared by the voice and then initiated by the action of Sam Fathers . . .<sup>20</sup>

The action of Sam Fathers that Waggoner refers to involves the killing of Ike's first deer. This act is, of itself, the traditional one at which the boy passes into manhood. However, under the guidance of Sam Fathers, the act assumes almost religious tones and it becomes an initiation into the flow of time.

The passage in Go Down, Moses that deals with Ike's acceptance of and merging with time should be repeated here because it represents the ideal, the individual coming into perfect harmony with time.

. . . gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted. And more: as if some of them had not happened yet but would occur tomorrow, until at last it would seem to the boy that he himself had not come into existence yet, that none of his race nor the other subject race which his people had brought with them into the land had come here yet . . .<sup>21</sup>

This is the state that Quentin cannot attain or accept in spite of what Waggoner terms "all his probing and imagination." But then, Quentin did not have Sam Fathers.

Sam Fathers was the son of Ikkemotubbe and a slave

woman, and as such he was the inheritor of two lines of people who were close to a natural harmony with time and nature. Quentin's initiators, Miss Rosa with her inflexibility and Mr. Compson with his scepticism, do not approach the ideal set by Sam Fathers. Indeed, if there had been such a person in Thomas Sutpen's life, the grand design might not have come about at all.

Lacking someone to initiate him into the mysteries of the past, Quentin could have turned to the past as it is presented in books. But as Olga Vickery points out, the history or textbook in being ruthlessly factual abstracts emotion from the events it portrays. When this happens, the past becomes void of emotional allegiance and no longer carries either truth or reality.<sup>22</sup>

The only remaining source of information available to Quentin lies in what others have seen or heard and reported to him. This factor presents a major problem, for if we accept information from others, we must also anticipate their bias and unintentional shading. Quentin's situation is very similar to that confronting the reader of The Sound and the Fury. Although each narrator in that novel saw the same events, each has an entirely different view of what actually happened.

The degree of bias in those who told the Sutpen story to Quentin appears to be a function of their perception of Sutpen and their distance from him. This means that, given the monomania evident in Sutpen's actions, those closest to

him would have more accurate information, but they would also be more likely to view him in an unfavorable light.

Miss Rosa's bias supports this fact. As the sister-in-law, she is much closer to Sutpen than any of Quentin's sources, except, possibly, Henry. Yet, because of this closer association, she presents him to Quentin as a demon. Rosa's attitude toward Sutpen rests primarily on two basic factors. Each of these factors is in turn related to her own inability to comprehend the workings of time, for Sutpen is the cause of her view of the world as being ruled by an impersonal, antagonistic fate.

First, Sutpen had dominated the world of her childhood. Pourier points out that she had been indoctrinated into Sutpen hatred by her aunt almost from the day of her birth.<sup>23</sup> Her father was at this time beginning his withdrawal from the world, and his dealings with Sutpen were in part the cause of this withdrawal. Even Quentin is able to notice this, for he sees her childhood as one of separation.

She seemed to stand, to lurk, behind the neat picket fence of a small, grimly middleclass yard or lawn, looking out upon the whatever ogreworld of that quiet village street with that air of children born too late into their parents' lives and doomed to contemplate all human behavior through the complex and needless follies of adults . . .<sup>24</sup>

In a sense, Rosa spent her childhood in a state of timelessness, a state of being outside the flow of time. It is quite possible that in later contemplation, she came to blame Sutpen for this state.

The coming of the Civil War coincided with the begin-

nings of Rosa's adolescence, and with the coming of the Civil War, her father cut her off even more surely from the world and from time. Angered at the course that history has taken, he withdraws into a period of no time forcing Rosa to withdraw with him. He refuses to sell goods to participants in the war, forbids Rosa to speak to the soldiers, and finally nails himself into the attic.

The second factor in Rosa's hatred of Sutpen has its roots in this period of her life. Although she is caught up in her father's withdrawal, she makes two major efforts to rejoin the flow of time. Her poems, which date from this period, are an attempt to reenter time by participating in some way in the major historical event of that period. Her second effort involves the fairy tale that she builds around Charles Bon. Her removal from the world has cut her off from the future as well as the present, and, through this vicarious courtship, she dreams of a future that could possibly be hers. That this dream has validity for her is evident, for she relates it to

. . . that true wisdom which can comprehend that there is a might-have-been which is more true than truth, from which the dreamer, waking, says not 'Did I but dream?' but rather says, indicts [sic] high heaven's very self with: 'Why did I wake since waking I shall never sleep again?'"<sup>25</sup>

Pourier is correct in asserting that Rosa's flight to Sutpen's Hundred is an attempt to save her fairy tale world.<sup>26</sup> It is also an attempt to reenter time, for Wash with his announcement of Bon's death has burst into Rosa's



timeless world bringing time with him. She rushes the twelve miles and nineteen years to rejoin the world, to rejoin the movement of time. But again, she finds her movements blocked by Sutpen, for she is confronted by him through his son and daughters. Henry has killed Bon, killed the physical semblance of her dream. Clytie, whose face was to Rosa ". . . both more and less than Sutpen . . ." <sup>27</sup> stops her at the stairs, preventing her from seeing Bon's body. Judith refuses to grieve for him. Her dream of a future, the foundation of her fairy tale is destroyed as if it had never existed. She comes to believe that Sutpen is the motivation behind the destruction of her dream, that he is the agent who has prevented her from entering time.

Following this incident, Rosa, with Clytie and Judith, retreats again into a period of timelessness. They live a primitive existence whose only goal is to survive until the return of Thomas Sutpen. Although Rosa emphatically states that she has no intention, no idea, of marrying Sutpen, she joins Judith and Clytie in waiting for him. Sutpen has replaced Bon as the core of her dream of a future.

Pourier offers an acceptable insight into Rosa's thoughts and actions during this period.

It is sufficient to say that Sutpen represents all that would but cannot be. In her soliloquy he is given alternately the face of an ogre and the 'shape of a hero.' She recalls that her life 'was at last worth something' when she helped care for him after the war. His proposal is accepted simply because he is a man and, she thinks then, a heroic one: she 'lost all the shibboleth erupting of cannot, will not, never will in one red instant's fierce obliteration.'

The breaking of the engagement occurs only when he intimates that she is merely the means to provide him with another son to carry on the 'design.'<sup>28</sup>

Although Rosa will accept almost anything to achieve her dream of a future, Sutpen's proposition is the one thing that she cannot accept. She flees back to town to live the life of a pauper, irrevocably convinced that Sutpen is the demon incarnate that she had been conditioned to believe he was.

So in each of her attempts to enter the flow of time, Rosa has found herself blocked by the figure of Thomas Sutpen. If we cannot accept her demonizing of the man, at least we can understand her point of view. Sutpen is the impersonal almost invisible force that she comes to associate with history and fate. For her, he is demonic in that he cuts her off from life and from the future.

Mr. Compson, Quentin's other major source, holds a view of the Sutpen story that is at odds with that presented by Miss Rosa. The difference in the two accounts is explainable, in part, in terms of distance. Unlike Rosa who was too close to Sutpen, Mr. Compson is far enough removed for objectivity, but too far removed for complete accuracy.

Both Waggoner and Vickery maintain that Mr. Compson does strive for objectivity. They feel that he attempts to be an "emotionally uninvolved rational observer"<sup>29</sup> and that he attempts "to abstract all emotional bias from his account."<sup>30</sup> Yet, neither Waggoner nor Vickery notes that he fails in the attempt.

He finds the Sutpen chronicle as baffling as Quentin does.

Yes, Judith, Eon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs.<sup>31</sup>

The formula does not work because he has added one ingredient. He has unconsciously projected his own feelings into his interpretation of the story.

In "Man, Time, Eternity," an essay on The Sound and the Fury, Cleanth Brooks notes that "Mr. Compson by 1910 was a defeated man."<sup>32</sup> His explanation is that ". . . the knowledge of his daughter's wantonness had hit Mr. Compson hard, and his parade of cynicism about women and virginity . . . must have been in part an attempt to soften the blow for Quentin and perhaps for himself."<sup>33</sup> The cynicism displayed by Mr. Compson in The Sound and the Fury is carried over to Absalom, Absalom!.

Throughout the sections in the novel devoted to his point of view are repeated references to virginity and to what he feels are the unnecessary codes built around it. He feels that Henry

. . . may have been conscious that his fierce provincial's pride in his sister's virginity was a false quantity which must incorporate in itself an inability to endure in order to be precious, to exist, and so must depend upon its loss, absence, to have existed at all. In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all . . .<sup>34</sup>

Possibly this is the situation that he sees developing in his own family in The Sound and the Fury. Perhaps he recognized Quentin's situation in that of Henry. At any rate, this situation clouds his thinking in his attempt to jump from the facts he has to those that he does not have.

In attempting to explain Judith's forbidden marriage and the subsequent events, he seizes upon the Negro mistress. He bases Sutpen's actions, and those of Henry, not on the fact that she was a Negro nor on the fact that she is a mistress, but on the marriage ceremony between her and Bon. "It would be the fact of the ceremony, regardless of what kind, that Henry would balk at: Bon knew this. It would not be the mistress or even the child . . ."<sup>35</sup> Henry then holds the three of them, Bon, Judith, and himself in suspension, waiting for Bon to renounce this first ceremony. But Bon will not, and rather than see Judith as part of Bon's harem Henry finally fires the fatal pistol shot.

Mr. Compson himself knows that this cannot be the correct answer:

. . . even to the unworldly Henry, let alone the more travelled father, the existence of the eighth part negro mistress and the sixteenth part negro son, granted even the morganatic ceremony . . . was reason enough, which is drawing honor a little fine even for

the shadowy paragons which are our ancestors born in the South and come to man--and womanhood about eighteen sixty or sixty one. It's just incredible. It just does not explain.<sup>36</sup>

For lack of a better answer, he continues with this explanation. But he admits his bafflement, sums it all up with, "Or perhaps that's it: they dont [sic] explain and we are not supposed to know."<sup>37</sup>

At any rate, Mr. Compson's version of the story does little to enlighten Quentin. The cloud that hides the events is as thick as ever. We should note that in projecting his feelings on virginity and the brother-sister relationship into his account, Mr. Compson has heightened the intensity of the bond that Quentin feels for Henry.

There is one possible remaining source that deserves comment. Some critics have stated that Quentin received part of his information from his grandfather, General Compson. As Brooks has pointed out, there are no references in the novel to any conversations between the two. All of the information that he receives from his grandfather is submitted through Mr. Compson, thus making it secondhand information, and more than that of either Mr. Compson or Miss Rosa. Even Quentin himself is not free from the bias evident in the other characters. We know that he is suicidal, and that he does kill himself a short time after the reconstruction of events in Absalom, Absalom!. We also know that he was plagued by incestuous thoughts involving his sister, Caddy. Although the situation propelled him into the Sutpen

story, it also clouds his thinking on certain facets of that story.

Shreve does not fully understand the meaning of the events; he is too far removed in both time and distance for complete understanding. He lacks the environmental background, and therefore the full social impact of Bon's Negro blood is lost to him. This is evidenced by the fact that he repeatedly calls Miss Rosa, Aunt Rosa. The terms Aunt and Uncle were frequently applied by whites to older members of the black community. Shreve himself recognizes his own inability to understand. In the closing pages of the novel he says:

I just want to understand it if I can and I dont [sic] know how to say it better. Because it's something my people haven't got. Or if we have got it, it all happened long ago across the water and so now there aint [sic] anything to look at every day to remind us of it.<sup>38</sup>

However, it is precisely because of the fact that he is so far removed from the events that Shreve is so important to the novel and to the reconstruction. His removal allows him to see the bias in the stories told by the other characters and the bias in Quentin himself. Only through Shreve is it possible for Quentin to move past the bias to the essence of the happenings.

The question now arises of how these distorted views of the past can be used in any interpretation of the past. Faulkner indicates in Absalom, Absalom! that an interpretation can only be arrived at through a reconstruction of

those events which are known to have taken place and through a re-creation of those events for which we lack information.

The reconstruction in Absalom, Absalom! moves from the known to the unknown. The arrival of Mr. Compson's letter rouses Shreve's curiosity. He actually, unwittingly, begins the process by repeating what he has heard of the Sutpen history from Quentin. Although Quentin resists at first, thinking, "I have heard too much, I have been told too much; I have had to listen to too much, too long . . . ,"<sup>39</sup> Shreve eventually pulls him into the process. He repeats the information that he has had from his father and that from his grandfather through his father. This repetition is perhaps as much for his own benefit as it is for Shreve's. Faulkner makes it clear that this is not very pleasant for Quentin. His voice is described as being sullen, flat, or dead.

Finally, the facts are not enough to explain the happenings. Quentin and Shreve move easily, almost naturally, from the factual into the imaginative. The imagination allows us to merge identities with the characters who actually participated in the events. In the novel this mingling of identities begins with a Charles-Shreve and a Quentin-Henry merger. Faulkner is explicit about this merger for he states, ". . . that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas Eve: four of them and then just two--Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry . . . ." <sup>40</sup> This

merger has become so complete that at the end of the reconstruction process it does not matter who is speaking.

This merging is absolutely necessary to an understanding of the meaning of history, for through it one is able to disregard the biased elements in the accounts of the events, and one is able to ascribe motives and reasons to those characters who actually participated. The universality of the past makes such a merger possible. For although we have no awareness of it, each act in the past has, to some small degree, affected all mankind; and has therefore become a part of the memory of all mankind. We are not consciously able to recall all actions, but they are there as part of our racial memory. This is why Quentin says, "Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us."<sup>41</sup>

So racial memory of the past is used to allow us to merge our identity with that of the characters who lived in the past. Through this merger we are able to reconstruct the events as closely as possible to the way in which they actually happened. For those events about which we have no information, we must use imagination to fill the voids in our reconstruction. The events or facts which Shreve and Quentin create in Absalom, Absalom! are not wild or illogical, for Faulkner tells us that they were, ". . . dedicated to that best of ratiocination . . .,"<sup>42</sup> and that the people



or facts that they created were ". . . probably true enough . . . ."43 These statements by Faulkner would seem to indicate that the reconstruction was as close as possible to the original pattern.

Many of the motives and movements created by Quentin and Shreve are based on the fact of Bon's Negro blood. This fact and Quentin's knowledge of it are essential to the reconstruction process as presented in the novel. It is the one piece in the puzzle that allows all the others to fall into place. It explains motives and events that otherwise seem inexplicable.

There are almost as many answers to the question of where Quentin learned of Bon's Negro blood as there are interpretations of the novel itself. Yet the fact that none of these answers has been universally accepted indicates that there is some doubt as to their validity.

In a recent essay, "What Quentin Saw 'Out There'," Hershel Parker advanced the theory that Quentin realized Bon's Negro blood when he realized that Jim Bond had the Sutpen face and that he could only have inherited that face from Charles Bon.<sup>44</sup> However, Brooks points out that Quentin could only know the Sutpen face from Miss Rosa's telling him that Clytie had it. And Rosa herself did not realize that Bond had Sutpen features.<sup>45</sup>

Gerald Langford's introduction to Faulkner's Revision of Absalom, Absalom!, contends that much of the confusion surrounding the question arises from care-

less revisions of the novel. However, Cleanth Brooks has proven satisfactorily in "The Narrative Structure of Absalom, Absalom!" that this is not the case and that the novel, except for a few minor discrepancies, is consistent.<sup>46</sup> In The Novels of William Faulkner, Olga Vickery makes no attempt to face the question of Quentin's knowledge. And Hyatt Waggoner merely notes in William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World that in not telling the reader where Quentin got his information, ". . . Faulkner is following the Jamesian formula of making the reader imagine."<sup>47</sup>

Although I have used Cleanth Brooks as an authority in pointing out flaws in the theories of other critics, there is much in his own interpretation that is puzzling. Brooks contends in his critical work, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, and in a recent essay, "The Narrative Structure of Absalom, Absalom!," that Quentin could only have gotten this information from Henry. Brooks bases this interpretation on several important passages in the novel and, more particularly, on what is missing from these passages.

He notes that, ". . . if one will look on pages 181 and 266-74 he will find that Quentin must have learned the secret of Bon's birth on his night visit to Sutpen's Hundred with Miss Rosa . . . ."<sup>48</sup> Both of these passages do contain statements by Quentin to the effect that he gained the knowledge of Bon's blood at this time.

This statement limits Quentin's possible sources to Rosa, Clytie, and Henry. Brooks eliminates Miss Rosa by pointing out that after her meeting with Henry, ". . . she remained in almost a catatonic state, and so was unwilling--perhaps unable--to talk."<sup>49</sup> And he disposes of Clytie by noting that there is no allusion to any conversation between Quentin and her before Quentin went up to confront Henry, and there was no opportunity for any after Quentin returned.<sup>50</sup> If we accept these eliminations, Henry is the only possible source. The secret is not divulged in the conversation between Henry and Quentin during the dialogue on page 373, but Brooks feels that this fragment does not present the full exchange between Quentin and Henry. He argues that the novel contains many fragments that do not represent full accounts. He cites the distance that Miss Rosa had traveled while Quentin was with Henry as evidence that more conversation could have taken place. And he believes that the fact that Henry seems willing to talk is an indication that he would have answered the question had Quentin put it to him.<sup>51</sup>

It is curious to note that Brooks sees the flaw in this interpretation. In William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country he asks, "Would Henry Sutpen have volunteered to a stranger his reason for having killed Charles Bon? Or would Quentin Compson, awed and aghast at what he saw, put such questions as these to the wasted figure upon the bed?"<sup>52</sup> And in "The Narrative

Structure of Absalom, Absalom!" he asks, "Would Quentin, as a stranger entering the room uninvited, have broached intimate matters to Henry? It's a fair question."<sup>53</sup> To support his thesis that Quentin would have put the question to Henry, Brooks cites two points. First, Miss Rosa would have mentioned the name of her companion and Henry would have recognized the name as that of his father's only friend.<sup>54</sup> And secondly, he points out that Henry showed no reluctance to answer in the scrap of conversation that Faulkner has given us.<sup>55</sup>

It is entirely possible that Henry would have answered the question had Quentin asked him, but I do not feel that Quentin would have asked this type of question. Quentin, because of his problems with time, honor, and incest, was not filled with self-confidence. The question is too indelicate for one of Quentin's sensitivity.

But if Quentin did not learn of Bon's secret from Henry, from whom did he learn it? There are two possibilities. It is highly probable that Clytie knew from Henry's justification of his part in the death of Bon, and if not from this source, then from her sister, Judith. And then there is Rosa. Rosa is a different case. Her total bafflement at the handling of Bon's funeral and at Judith's lack of grief indicates that at that time she had no inkling of the matter. She stated that during the time she remained at Sutpen's Hundred waiting with Judith and Clytie for Sutpen's return, ". . . not once did we mention Charles Bon."<sup>56</sup> And

it is not likely that she would have been told during the period between Sutpen's return and her flight to Jefferson. These facts imply that Rosa could not have known of Bon's Negro blood.

However, Rosa had spent her childhood lurking in darkened hallways and listening behind closed doors. She would have known how to take half-heard conversations and seemingly aimless acts and combine them in a reasonable approximation of the truth. She had forty-three years to mull over, digest, and compute the events in the Sutpen family. In this fashion, she could have surmised the truth about Charles Bon.

She tells Quentin that there is "something" hidden in the house.<sup>57</sup> She does not use "someone" since she is not speaking of Henry but of the secret. Apparently this usage was intended by Faulkner. The manuscript of Absalom, Absalom! contains a pasted-in section covering this passage in which the word "somebody" is crossed out and replaced by the word "something." This revision occurs twice in the passage.<sup>58</sup>

Rosa coerced Quentin into making the trip with her not merely to determine if Henry was at Sutpen's Hundred, for she apparently already knew that. But she was driven, compelled, to know if her surmisings were correct. She had to put the question to Henry, for there was and had always been, antagonism between Clytie and herself.

Of course this is supposition, but it would explain

the compulsion she apparently feels, the fact that she is willing to use a hatchet to break in if necessary, and the fact that she struck Clytie who tried to bar her way. It would also answer the incredulity that Shreve felt when he described her as an "old dame,"

. . . that hadn't been out there, hadn't set foot in the house even in forty-three years, yet who not only said there was somebody hiding in it but found somebody that would believe her, would drive that twelve miles out there in a buggy at midnight to see if she was right or not?<sup>59</sup>

Apparently she had surmised correctly, but the confirmation was still a tremendous shock. Quentin remembered her with,

. . . the eyes wide and unseeing like a sleep-walker's, the face which had always been tallow-hued now possessing some still profounder, some almost unbearable, quality of bloodlessness--and he thought, 'What? What is it now? It's not shock.<sup>60</sup> And it never has been fear. Can it be triumph?'

It probably was triumph--triumph in the fact that Sutpen had irrevocably defeated himself, and triumph in the knowledge that she was right in her suppositions.

Although Brooks rules out the possibility of Rosa telling Quentin the secret on the ride back to Jefferson, it is possible that she could have given Quentin the information at that time. The ride would have taken at least an hour, and it is unlikely that Rosa would have remained totally speechless for this long a period. However, it is more probable that she gave Quentin the information during the trip to Sutpen's Hundred. Perhaps she did not tell him the secret completely, but instead gave him enough clues to

set his mind working.

The confirmation of what Rosa had told him, or what she had hinted at, would have come from Clytie. There are two passages in the novel that suggest that this is the case. In the first passage, Shreve tells Quentin ". . . you wouldn't have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn't been out there and seen Clytie."<sup>61</sup> Quentin replies affirmatively to this statement. The second passage occurs while Shreve is recounting the events that occurred that night at Sutpen's Hundred:

. . . and then you saw that Clytie's trouble wasn't anger nor even distrust; it was terror, fear. And she didn't tell you in so many words because she was still keeping that secret for the sake of the man who had been her father too as well as for the sake of the family which no longer existed, whose here-to-fore inviolate and rotten mausoleum she still guarded--didn't tell you in so many words anymore than she told you in so many words how she had been in the room that day when they brought Bon's body in and Judith took from his pocket the metal case she had given him with her picture in it; she didn't tell you, it just came out of the terror and the fear after she turned you loose . . . .<sup>62</sup>

There are several important factors in this quotation.

First, Clytie ". . . was still keeping that secret for the sake of the man who had been her father . . . ." She was not, as some critics have stated, keeping secret the fact of Henry's presence; she was keeping secret the fact of Bon's ancestry. The second factor lies in the statements that Clytie ". . . didn't tell you in so many words . . ." and ". . . she didn't tell you, it just came out of the terror and the fear . . . ." These statements would imply that

Clytie had said something even though it is not recorded in Quentin's re-creation of the scene. She did not tell Quentin explicitly what the secret was, but she did say enough for Quentin to add her words to those he already had from Miss Rosa. As Shreve repeated it,

. . . you saw it was not rage but terror, and not nigger terror because it was not about herself but was about whatever it was that was upstairs, that she had kept hidden up there for almost four years; and she didn't tell you in the actual words because even in the terror she kept the secret; nevertheless she told you, or at least all of a sudden you knew . . . .<sup>63</sup>

It is also interesting to note that the secret here is referred to as a "whatever," not "whoever" as would be the case if the term referred to Henry. There seems to be a link here with Rosa's use of the term "something" to refer to the secret hidden at Sutpen's Hundred.

There are, then, three separate references to Clytie as the ultimate source of Quentin's knowledge of Bon's Negro blood. But whatever Quentin's source, this fact is the basis upon which much of the reconstruction rests. The reconstruction itself moves from facts through the imagination to an interpretation. The facts are gained as the distorted versions of the story are compared and revised to form a framework of events. Imagination supplies the missing elements, and it also provides motives for the characters who act within this framework. From this framework of fact and motives it is possible to arrive at a reasonable picture of the past. The reconstruction itself is not a true picture



for it contains elements which are quite probably incorrect, but it also contains correct elements which could only be arrived at through intuition.

We have, then, a reconstruction which does not contain the past, but which does contain the essence of the past. It is possible to arrive at an interpretation of the events from this essence that will allow us finally to draw a meaning from them.

The meaning inherent in the Sutpen chronicle must have been very profound. When Quentin realized it, he lay in bed shivering: not from cold, but from the import of what he had realized. If we accept the past as being universal, then any meaning derived from the past must also be universal. And therefore, the meaning that faces Quentin would not lie just with the fall of Sutpen or with the fall of the old South, but with all mankind. The meaning or moral truth that Quentin faces is the fact of individual responsibility. Through the reconstruction process he has found that the world is shaped and ordered by the actions of those men who lived in the past. He also found that one must accept responsibility for one's own actions and for whatever consequences these actions may have in the future. The decision to accept or reject the responsibility is made all the more appalling since there is no way of knowing what shapes these consequences may take nor in what direction they may move.

Thomas Sutpen, through his act of putting aside the Spanish wife, had chosen to reject the responsibility

embodied in the marriage. This rejection is the source of all the suffering that follows. It is true that he attempted to buy his way free, but freedom from responsibility cannot be bought nor the workings of moral principles slowed with money.

This is exactly the approach that we find used by modern man in similar situations. Both Hyatt Waggoner and Cleanth Brooks have pointed out that Sutpen is, in a real sense, modern man. In his essay, Waggoner states that:

Sutpen was the new man, the post-Machiavellian man consciously living by power knowledge alone, refusing to acknowledge the validity of principles that he cannot or will not live by and granting reality to nothing that cannot be known with abstract rational clarity. He lives by a calculated expediency.<sup>64</sup>

Cleanth Brooks says, "I have remarked that Sutpen's innocence is peculiarly the innocence of modern man. For like modern man, Sutpen does not believe in Jehovah. He does not believe in the goddess Tyche. He is not the victim of bad luck. He simply made a mistake."<sup>65</sup>

Thomas Sutpen lives by the belief that there is no power or force greater than himself. The flaw in his make-up comes from this belief, and it accounts for the suffering in the novel. Waggoner states that "his error had been ultimately, of course, in the moral sense, that he had always treated people as things."<sup>66</sup>

Suffering and death are the inevitable results of such beliefs and such actions. The impact of all this was not lost on Quentin for he lived at the time of the emergence

of the modern man. And all the horror of what was in store for future generations was apparent to him.

Faulkner has emphasized this view in the novel in several ways. First of all, the title and story line, to some extent, follow the Biblical references to Absalom, the son of David. And secondly, the fate of Jim Bond is reminiscent of the voice crying in the wilderness that is recorded in the book of Isaiah. The fact that the prophet in Absalom, Absalom! is an idiot and that the cry has become an almost inhuman howl serves to intensify the horror of the situation in which modern man finds himself.

## REQUIEM FOR A NUN

Although Requiem for a Nun is usually viewed as the sequel to Faulkner's earlier work, Sanctuary, it is much closer in theme and technique to Absalom, Absalom!. It is true that Requiem for a Nun does return to the lives of Temple Drake and Gowan Stevens a number of years after the events depicted in Sanctuary, and that Requiem for a Nun does explore further the concepts of law and justice that were presented in that novel. However, as Olga Vickery points out, in Requiem for a Nun these concepts are approached in a manner that is quite different from that employed in Sanctuary.<sup>67</sup> This different approach is an outgrowth or continuation of the themes and techniques that Faulkner presented in Absalom, Absalom!. When viewed as companion pieces, it can be seen that Absalom, Absalom! details the paths through which the past may be approached, and Requiem for a Nun explores the existence and workings of the moral truths or principles embodied in the past.

Many elements in the two novels correspond, but one of the more basic connections is evident in Temple herself. For Temple, in Requiem for a Nun, is an extension of Thomas Sutpen. Just as Sutpen was the modern man in implication, Temple is the modern man in fact, and many of the statements made by critics on this facet of Sutpen's character apply

also to Temple. She apparently does not believe in a power greater than herself nor does she believe in luck, and like Sutpen she tends to use people as things. To her, Gowan is merely a convenience or possibly a means of self-punishment, Nancy is someone to talk to who could understand her terminology, and the blackmailer is both an escape from an unhappy marriage and a means of further self-punishment.

The parallel does not end here, for Temple's situation assumes a pattern much like that of Sutpen. They both have committed a violation of moral law: Sutpen's putting aside of the Spanish wife was a refusal to accept the responsibility inherent in his marriage vows and Temple's failure to resist the evil that entrapped her was a refusal to accept responsibility for her own actions. Neither is aware of the implications of such a refusal. When the consequences of their actions begin to appear, they are both baffled. Sutpen tried to reduce the whole affair to a recipe so that he could find the missing ingredient, the proportions that were wrong. Temple cannot accept her own part in the events portrayed in Sanctuary; she cannot understand why she actually chose to accept the evil when she could have fled it so easily. Of the trip to Memphis she stated, ". . . I had two legs and I could see, and I could have simply screamed up the main street of any of the little towns we passed, just as I could have walked away from the car after Gow--we ran it into the tree . . . ."68

Such a violation of moral principle apparently carries

within itself its own seeds of destruction or doom. Sutpen's doom took the form of the son that he had helped create and then denied along with the Spanish wife. This son, Charles Bon, who arrived years after the original act, brings with him a host of other moral violations including incest, miscegenation, and murder. Temple's doom, in much the same fashion, came in the form of the love letters that she had written while in the Memphis sporting house. Like the doom that overtook Sutpen, these letters bring with them adultery, child abuse, and murder. Sutpen's doom led ultimately to the destruction of his empire and of his descendants, and Temple's, but for the intervention of Nancy, would have had much the same effect.

It is ironic that both of these violations of moral principle are based on a failure to accept individual responsibility, and yet both can, to a certain extent, be rectified by an admission of that same responsibility. Charles Bon wanted only recognition from Sutpen, and that recognition would have carried with it an acceptance of the responsibility that Sutpen had evaded. Similarly, had Temple acknowledged the letters, accepted responsibility for them, the blackmailer would have had no hold over her. In both cases, the past would have ceased to trouble them, and a great deal of human misery could have been avoided.

In addition to being an extension of Thomas Sutpen, Temple also contains much of Quentin Compson. She is sensitive enough to feel the pressure of the past for recognition,

and her responses to this pressure are much like those of Quentin in Absalom, Absalom!. She suffers the same fragmentation of personality, the same guilt feelings, and attempts the same denial and flight that Quentin did. All of her reactions in response to the past are similar to Quentin's reactions, and they all meet with the same results.

Temple's fragmentation of personality is evident in the fact that she sees herself as two different people, Temple Drake and Mrs. Gowan Stevens. As Temple Drake she is haunted by her past. This is the personality that hired Nancy, "the ex-dope-fiend nigger whore," so that she will have someone to talk to. She can neither explain the apparent liking for evil that she finds within herself nor resist the forces that she has set into motion. Mrs. Gowan Stevens is that fragment of her personality that tries to fit into the modern society of Jefferson, Mississippi. She is merely a facade turned to the world, a fragment that is completely disassociated from the past and untouched by it. At times in the novel, the Mrs. Gowan Stevens fragment assumes the shape of the bereaved mother whose child had been taken through no fault of her own, but as Temple Drake she knows better.

Temple Drake, a personality very much affected by the past, is heir to the guilt feelings that accompany a denial of the past. These guilt feelings involve the thought that one has committed some horrible crime that demands equally horrible punishment. Perhaps these feelings account for her

refusal to accept the letters when they are freely offered by the blackmailer. Subconsciously she believes that the course she attempted to take, the flight with the blackmailer, will cause her enough grief and punishment to atone for the crime she feels she has committed.

While Quentin for a time refused to accept the possibility of any meaning in the past, Temple tries to deny the past existence entirely. She attempts to give the past existence only in the mind of man. Then by refusing to accept that existence in her own mind, she can delegate the past to nothingness.

Because suddenly it could be as if it had never been, never happened. You know: somebody-- Hemingway, wasn't it?--wrote a book about how it had never actually happened to a gir--woman, if she just refused to accept it, no matter who remembered, bragged. And besides, the ones who could--remember --were both dead.<sup>69</sup>

However, she finds that any attempt to deny the past is doomed to failure. For as Gavin remarked to Gowan earlier in the novel, ". . . you cannot, can never not, stop remembering?."<sup>70</sup>

Temple also finds that one cannot flee the past. Her trip to California after the trial makes this fact clear to her. Speaking of Nancy's impending execution, her son asks, "'Where will we go then, mamma?'"<sup>71</sup> And on her return to the hotel that same day she finds the note from Gavin which echoes the same words. The answer to the question is of course, nowhere.

Finally, although she knows that one cannot ignore,



deny, or flee the past, Temple still cannot accept its hold on her. She states, "If I would just stop struggling: how much time we could save. I came all the way back from California, but I still cant (sic) seem to quit."<sup>72</sup>

Temple's situation is complicated by the fact that the society in which she lives has committed precisely the same violation of moral law that she has committed. The three act play, which tells of Temple's efforts to extricate herself from the situation in which she has been placed by her own refusal to accept responsibility, forms the central core of the novel. Interchapters which tell of the displacement of moral law and the founding of a society based on the refusal to accept responsibility precede each of the three acts of the play.

"The Courthouse (A Name for a City)," which functions as a prologue to the dramatic presentation of the first act, portrays the beginning of the growth of Jefferson from a sleepy frontier settlement into a city. The name of the city itself and the courthouse around which it grows are traced to an attempt by a few individuals to avoid responsibility for the loss of the lock belonging to Alexander Holston, or in other words, in an attempt to ". . . cope with a situation which otherwise was going to cost somebody money . . . ." <sup>73</sup> The lock itself is charged off as, ". . . proofless and ephemeral axle grease . . . ." <sup>74</sup> Old Alec Holston is paid fifteen dollars by the town, and all concerned feel that the responsibility for the loss of the lock

has been successfully avoided. Yet, Faulkner writes that the avoidance leaves, ". . . the whole race of man, as long as it endured, forever and irrevocably fifteen dollars deficit, fifteen dollars in the red . . . ."75

Instead of avoiding responsibility, the members of the community have succeeded in replacing moral law, justice, with man-made law. The responsibility of payment for the missing lock has been transferred through legal machinations from the moral sphere into the legal sphere, thus replacing moral law with man-made law. This process, once begun, is one which feeds upon itself and grows almost without restraint. When viewed in this light, the courthouse seems the next inevitable step.

Olga Vickery points out in The Novels of William Faulkner that the courthouse itself is a paradox.

It is at once the symbol of man's dream of moral perfection and the cause of its destruction. Having housed their hopes and aspirations not only decently but magnificently, men freed themselves of the responsibility for making their dreams a reality. The subsequent confusion of morality and legality was inevitable; appropriately, the temple of justice serves as the guardian of all the old, accumulated legal documents, which are a constant reminder of legalized injustice, of men's exploitation of the land and of other men.<sup>76</sup>

The courthouse, symbol of man's perfection and of the society which built it has a rottenness at its core just as the society is founded on an immoral act, and it too has a rottenness at its core.

It is ironic that on three different occasions there

were warnings of the possible outcome of the events.

Vickery notes that Ratcliffe, representing the voice of the individual, is silenced by the voice of the group.<sup>77</sup>

Sutpen's French architect, speaking of the courthouse and the town, tells them that, "'In fifty years you will be trying to change it in the name of what you will call progress. But you will fail; but you will never be able to get away from it.'"<sup>78</sup> And finally, Peabody tells the man for whom the town was named, "'Only her name's Jefferson now. We cant (sic) ever forget that any more now.'"<sup>79</sup> Each of these three, Ratcliffe as the individual, the architect as the aesthetic, and Pettigrew as representative of that government which had so recently declared itself to be based on moral principles, warned of the ensuing but unforeseeable consequences that must follow should the courthouse and all it represents be initiated.

The second of the interchapters, "The Golden Dome (Beginning Was the Word)," moves from Jefferson to the state capitol at Jackson. The "Word" referred to in the title of the interchapter is, of course, statehood or commonwealth. For this segment portrays the growth of those same forces evident in the founding of Jefferson into a much larger more powerful entity. They have grown until, ". . . men's mouths were full of law and order, all men's mouths were round with the sound of money . . ." <sup>80</sup> Morality is a thing of the past, a tradition that most men consider to be dead. What had begun simply as an effort to avoid the payment of fif-

teen dollars for a missing lock has become a force that pervades and controls all segments of human society. The golden dome, symbolic of this society, proves to be, ". . . more durable than the ice and the pre-night cold, soaring, hanging as one blinding spheroid above the center of the Commonwealth, incapable of being either looked full or evaded, peremptory, irrefragible, and reassuring . . . ."81

"The Jail (Nor Even Yet Quite Relinquish--)" is the third and final interchapter in the novel. This segment returns to the history of Jefferson, following it from the final point in the first interchapter to the present.

The jail itself presents something of a paradox.

Faulkner noted in the first interchapter that the jail was as old as the town, which makes it older than the courthouse and older than the displacement of moral law upon which the society is based. And in the final interchapter, Faulkner tells us that the jail has watched the flow of progress around itself. Thus the jail is representative of the past in the present, and progress, or the movement of time, merely flows around it. This interpretation is underlined in two ways. First, the old logs of the original jail still exist: they are merely encased in a modern trapping of brick and plaster. And secondly, the story of Cecelia Farmer and the scratching on the window pane can evoke a presence dead for a hundred years. In another sense, the jail is, as Olga Vickery views it, both extension and denial of the forces which have built the modern world. The jail

is extension in that, ". . . punishment has become as abstract and arbitrary as the law it reports to implement."<sup>82</sup> The result is, of course, ". . . complete chaos in which public morality is confused with virtue, legal immunity with innocence, and legal punishment with penitence."<sup>83</sup> This system has removed from the individual the responsibility for self-judgment and for self-punishment. The jail is a denial of those same forces in that it isolates the individual from the rest of society, thereby forcing him to see his own individuality, and presumably his own responsibility.<sup>84</sup>

Michael Millgate states in his work, The Achievement of William Faulkner, that the interchapter entitled, "The Courthouse (A Name for a City)," first appeared in "Harper's." The story version was shorter than that in Requiem for a Nun, but the important fact is that the story version indicates that Gavin Stevens is the source of the story. Millgate further states that, ". . . although the interchapters of the novel are narrated in terms of the conventions of third-person objectivity, the attitudes they embody are close to those expressed by Gavin Stevens in the dramatic sections . . . ." <sup>85</sup> From this fact and from his role in the dramatic sections, Millgate concludes that, "Gavin Stevens . . . is effectively the controlling intelligence throughout the whole of Requiem for a Nun . . . ." <sup>86</sup>

But what of Stevens himself? He is the one advantage that Temple Drake possesses that both Thomas Sutpen and Quentin Compson lacked. Gavin Stevens functions in this

novel much like Sam Fathers functioned in Go Down, Moses. He, better than anyone else in the novel, except Nancy, understands the past, its affect on the present and future, and how it must be dealt with. Certainly, he is the pivotal figure in the novel, and it is he who guides Temple in her efforts to come to terms with her past.

Gavin is described in Requiem for a Nun as being a lawyer, educated at Harvard and Heidelberg, who is, ". . . champion not so much of truth as of justice, or of justice as he sees it . . . ." <sup>87</sup> Further, he is said to look more like a poet than a lawyer, and perhaps there is more in this statement than first meets the eye. If Gavin is more poet than lawyer in his thinking, then he is better suited to perceive the lack of truth or of justice in the world around him. He is also better suited through the poetic imagination to initiate and control the reconstruction process through which the past must be approached. And since injustice has its roots in the past, this approach must be used.

Olga Vickery states that, "Stevens' concern is to re-establish justice as a moral and personal concept instead of merely a legal and social precept." <sup>88</sup> Or in other words, Gavin intends to re-establish justice as an individual responsibility. To do this, he must begin with the individual in general and with Temple Drake in particular. He intends to make Temple aware of the fact that she is responsible for the part that she has played, make her see the injustice that she as an individual has caused and perpetuated.

Temple's concept of justice and of the individual's part in it is evident in her actions at the beginning of the novel. The pretense for her return from California and for the visit to the governor is the saving of Nancy's life. She offers to commit perjury and originates the idea of the affidavit. Such actions seem to indicate that she sees justice as an extension of man-made law, as an abstract concept which can be maneuvered to suit one's own ends. And even this concept is so huge and impersonal that she feels no responsibility toward it.

Gavin makes it clear at the outset that there are certain qualifications which must be met if Temple is to cease being troubled by her past. First, he insists that, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."<sup>89</sup> This statement indicates that a return to the past is necessary to find justice, and the only way the past may be approached is through the reconstruction of past events involving the imagination. Vickery clarifies Gavin's statement somewhat by noting that, "Each decision, whether personal or communal, initiates a sequence of cause and effect which weaves a pattern of retribution independent of man's will or desire."<sup>90</sup> But she also notes that man can reverse the pattern of his life, and by so doing, affect to some extent the past.<sup>91</sup> So Gavin apparently hopes that by forcing Temple to see her own part in the growth of and perpetuation of injustice, he can cause a change in her life that will to some extent lessen those forces.

This point leads to the second qualification. Gavin stated that he wants Temple Drake. Temple is that facet of the Temple Drake-Mrs. Gowan Stevens personality with which he must deal. Mrs. Gowan Stevens is merely an outward facade, a face turned toward the world. She lives in and is concerned only with the present while Temple Drake is very much concerned with and influenced by the past.

Thirdly, Gavin stated that he wanted the truth. The truth is essential to what he plans, for as he puts it, "What we are trying to deal with now is injustice. Only truth can cope with that. Or love."<sup>92</sup> Only truth can cope with injustice which is itself an untruth. Also, Gavin knows that Temple has been lying to herself for eight years and that for her arriving at the truth will be a very painful process. The method used by Gavin to combat injustice is essentially the same as that used by Shreve and Quentin in Absalom, Absalom! to arrive at the meaning in the Sutpen story. He intends to make Temple reconstruct the events in her past so that she can see for herself the morality and justice, or lack of them, in each aspect of her actions.

In Requiem for a Nun the reconstruction comprises the entire second act, and it involves Gavin, the governor, and, of course, Temple. It differs from the process detailed in Absalom, Absalom! in one aspect. The major participant in the events is also the major participant in the reconstruction. Because of this fact, the reconstruction assumes some of the aspects of a confessional, and religious factors



representing the moral laws that have been violated inevitably become a part of the process.

The make-up of the participants forms an interesting pattern because of the religious factor. Temple becomes the reluctant but penitent sinner confessing her sins. Gavin, assuming the role of the priest, prompts Temple, forcing the confession in spite of her reluctance. Faulkner notes that the governor, too, is symbolic. He appears to be, ". . . no known person, neither old nor young; he might be someone's idea not of God but of Gabriel perhaps, the Gabriel not before the crucifixion but after it."<sup>93</sup> The governor appears to represent the supreme moral power; however, he is also the highest elected official in the state and as such is also representative of those forces which have displaced moral law. Temple's confession, then, is made not to those forces representing moral good but to that faceless form symbolic of the displacement of moral law. By the end of the reconstruction this form has been replaced by Temple's husband, Gowan, so that her final confession is made not to the state but to the individual. This fact seems to indicate an ultimate return to individual responsibility and to the traditional moral laws.

One remark made by Gavin during the second act has been viewed differently by critics. Olga Vickery sees this remark, "Wait. Let me play too,"<sup>94</sup> as an attempt by Gavin to stop Temple's final defense against accepting her part in the course that events have taken.<sup>95</sup> Michael Millgate feels

that this and other comments represent Faulkner's efforts, ". . . to create artificial opportunities for Stevens to speak . . . ."96 Actually, the quote as it appears in Requiem for a Nun is an exact duplicate of one appearing in Absalom, Absalom!. In both instances it seems that the quote is part and parcel of Faulkner's approach to the reconstruction process. In one sense the reconstruction is play in that one builds motives, events, and characters with the imagination.

There are other important correspondences between the reconstructions presented in the two novels. In Absalom, Absalom! there were times when the imaginations of the two participants were merged, or at least moving in identical directions. Faulkner indicated this fact by repeatedly telling the reader that it did not matter who was speaking. In Requiem for a Nun this joint imagination, the fact that Gavin could tell Temple's story as well as she could herself, is pointed out through the riding analogy. The hurdle that Temple must clear is compared to a fence which must be cleared by a horse and rider. Once the re-creation of events has started, Temple states that even if the fence cannot be cleared, it can be broken through. Gavin replies, "Which means that anyway one of us will get over standing up. Oh yes, I'm still playing; I'm going to ride this one too."97 The horse and rider when clearing a barrier must act as one unit, one entity, as if both were controlled by a single mind.

Also like that in Absalom, Absalom!, the reconstruction in Requiem for a Nun contains a merging of identities. This facet of the reconstruction involves a merger by one of the participants with the identity of one of the characters involved in the actions of the past. And on at least one instance, Gavin tells the reader that his identity has merged with that of Temple's former lover, Red.

One of the first points that emerges during the process is Temple's realization of the fact of evil. She states that evil is terrible because it can replace God, can become the guiding force in one's life. It is also a very contagious thing for, ". . . there is a corruption even in just looking at evil, even by accident; that you can't haggle, traffic, with putrefaction--you cant [sic], you dont [sic] dare . . . ." <sup>98</sup> And further, she indicates the necessity and difficulty of individual resistance.

It's not even that you must resist it always. Because you've got to start much sooner than that. You've got to be already prepared to resist it, say no to it, long before you see it; you must have already said no to it long before you even know what it is. <sup>99</sup>

Temple's difficulties arose from the fact that she, not knowing what evil was, found herself caught up in it. Her problem was compounded by the fact that she, having found out what evil was, made no effort to resist it. She did not take responsibility for her actions; perhaps she felt that she could always claim that the events were things beyond her control that had happened to her.

In one sense her failure to resist evil is as great an offense against moral law as actively pursuing evil. Her failure to accept responsibility, to resist evil, is a condoning of that evil, and that fact is the source of her sin.

Temple's response to her failure is much like that of Thomas Sutpen. They both felt that the past could be treated like a balance sheet, that there was some action they could take which would mark the debt paid in full. Sutpen tried to use money to buy off the Spanish wife; Temple tried to use gratitude.

Gowan had married Temple in an attempt to expiate his part in her past. Through the marriage, Temple finds:

. . . that there was something even better, stronger, than tragedy to hold two people together: forgiveness. Only that seemed to be wrong. Only maybe it wasn't the forgiveness that was wrong, but the gratitude; and maybe the only thing worse than having to give gratitude constantly all the time, is having to accept it--<sup>100</sup>

The marriage itself is nothing but an endless cycle of forgiveness on the part of Gowan which requires gratitude on the part of Temple. She stayed, endured the marriage, perhaps because she felt that the marriage was a part of that self-punishment that she deserved, or perhaps because she felt that the situation was similar to her stay at the Memphis sporting house in that she could walk away any time she chose.

Then the first child is born and she discovers the flaw in her reasoning. There is no escape from the past, and self-flagellation isn't enough.

It was as though she realized for the first time that you--everyone--must, or anyway may have to, pay for your past; that past is something like a promissory note with a trick clause in it which, as long as nothing goes wrong, can be manumitted in an orderly manner, but which fate or luck or chance, can foreclose on you without warning.<sup>101</sup>

The endless cycle of forgiveness and gratitude was the orderly manner in which she tried to pay the debt. The foreclosure came in the form of her son.

Like Sutpen, she found that the consequences for an act or violation do not confine themselves to the one who committed the act, but spread outward in ever-widening circles. She now had to worry about the child as well as about herself, for Gowan had begun to doubt that he was the father of the child. The son's innocence of any wrong-doing was irrelevant, for the sins of the fathers, or mothers, do fall on the heads of the sons.

Temple's doom comes in the form of the love letters written eight years prior to the time of the novel. The letters bring with them that same evil that she failed to resist eight years ago, and she fails to resist it now. The consequences of her violation of moral law seem to fall with ever increasing rapidity and ever increasing intensity.

Perhaps her proposed flight with the blackmailer represents another attempt on her part to pay the eight-year-old debt through anguish and self-punishment. In any case, she was committed to this course of action. Nothing Nancy, the only other person who knew her plans, could say or do would stop her. So Nancy took what she felt was the only

course open to her; she stopped Temple's flight by murdering the infant daughter.

Most critics have not treated Nancy very kindly. Michael Millgate tells us that although Faulkner intended Nancy to be the nun in the title of the novel, intended her to be a sympathetic and tragic figure, he feels that it is impossible to accept her as such because of the murder of the child. He continues with the statement that, "Faulkner insists on Nancy's ignorance and on the simplicity of her faith, but the murder seems the act of a fanatic, worthy rather of a Doc Hines than of the Dilsey whom Nancy in many ways suggests."<sup>102</sup> Hyatt Waggoner echoes much the same sentiments, and he concludes that Nancy must be slightly mad.<sup>103</sup> Cleanth Brooks is more sympathetic toward her, feeling that her drastic measures are justified. However, he feels that Nancy as a character is not developed well enough in the novel for many readers to find her convincing.<sup>104</sup>

Upon reading the accounts of these critics and upon reading the novel, one can come to only one conclusion. Nancy is indeed slightly mad, and she does possess a certain amount of fanaticism. Only madness could account for her confrontation with the man at the bank, and certainly there is madness evident in the murder of the infant. Her fanaticism, which is itself a form of madness, can be seen in her conversation with Temple during the final act of the novel.

However, Nancy should not be dismissed quite as casually as some critics seem to have dismissed her. In fact,

when she is viewed against the backdrop of a society founded on a basic rottenness, she becomes one of the few sane characters in the novel. As Olga Vickery points out, the knowledge that Gavin forces into Temple's awareness, Nancy already has. The sacrificing of the child and of her own life have a meaning in addition to forcing Temple to accept her own responsibility and to save the child from suffering. As Vickery states it, "However horrifying her action, she has stopped Temple from starting yet another pattern of evil to be paid for not only by herself but by her children and perhaps even her children's children."<sup>105</sup> Vickery also points out that by her clear, emphatic acceptance of her own guilt in the matter, Nancy is to a certain extent reversing those forces which have replaced moral law with man-made law. For she has reaffirmed, ". . . her own moral nature, her own responsibility not only to the law but to herself and to God."<sup>106</sup>

And finally, it is Nancy who, with that one word, "Believe," provides Temple with the key to understanding her own dilemma. Gavin has already forced her to acknowledge that an evil carries with it consequences which can appear years and generations later. He has shown her that only through an acceptance of individual responsibility for that evil can the consequences be halted. But what then? She knows from her marriage that forgiveness and gratitude can themselves become an evil.

From Nancy she learns that evil, or sin, is inevitable,

and that suffering not only for individual sins but for the sins of man must follow. After the suffering, there is the promise of forgiveness from God, not the hope of forgiveness, for Nancy states that man must give up hope. This brings us back to the key word, "Believe," and hoping does not carry with it complete belief. Forgiveness is a trap into which Temple has fallen once, but the forgiveness of God does not require gratitude in ever increasing doses as does the forgiveness of man.

The implications of what Nancy reveals are as devastating to Temple as the implications of the Sutpen chronicle were to Quentin. She asks Nancy, "Believe what?" and Nancy replies, "I dont [sic] know. But I believes."<sup>107</sup> This exchange leaves her facing that awful question that has confronted man for ages, "And suppose tomorrow and tomorrow, and then nobody there, nobody waiting to forgive me."<sup>108</sup> And of course, there is but one answer, "If there is none, I'm sunk. We all are. Doomed. Damned."<sup>109</sup> Without God, without a supreme moral principle, there is nothing, and life itself becomes a mere exercise in futility. Gavin underlines the fact that without God, man is doomed, "Of course we are. Hasn't He been telling us that for going on two thousand years?"<sup>110</sup>

Requiem for a Nun ends on a more optimistic note than does Absalom, Absalom!. In Absalom, Absalom!, the final chord is struck by the sole remaining Sutpen, a half-wit howling in the wilderness whose cries prophesy the rise of



that society of which Sutpen is symbolic. The old traditions, which are based on moral law and which hold not the idea of truth and justice but truth and justice themselves, are falling away leaving man stripped of nobility and bereft of guidance. Requiem for a Nun picks up this theme where Absalom, Absalom! leaves off, and it portrays the anguish which must inevitably be, given that lack of nobility and of guidance. But Requiem for a Nun also offers an answer.

Justice and nobility are possible, but only if man returns to an acceptance of and compliance with those timeless, universal moral laws which formed the basis for the discarded traditions. Christianity embodies these moral laws and is itself responsible for many of the traditions. As Hyatt Waggoner notes, Requiem for a Nun does not attempt to prove the existence of God or of a supreme being.<sup>111</sup> But, Requiem for a Nun does argue that a return to the tenets and rules of proper conduct as expressed in Christianity is necessary.

And in one sense, the status of Christianity doesn't really matter for as Olga Vickery points out, "If heaven and even God are simply figments of man's imagination, he must still act as if both are indisputable since man's ethical responsibility is a necessity and not a contingency."<sup>112</sup> And this fact, stated on a much more elemental level comes out simply as Nancy's, "Believe."

## CONCLUSION

I began this paper with two purposes in mind. First, I felt that a study of Absalom, Absalom! and of Requiem for a Nun would lead to an understanding of Faulkner's concept of the relationship of man to history. These two novels do present this concept quite adequately. Moreover, they present the responses of the members of the Sutpen and of the Stevens families to the consequences of that history in depth.

Secondly, I felt that the understanding gained from that study could be used as a tool to aid in the evaluation of Faulkner's other works. A reading of the other novels with that concept of history in mind reveals that many of Faulkner's other major characters are caught up in this same man-versus-history relationship in some fashion.

The two novels that deal with the Sartoris family, The Unvanquished and Flags in the Dust, mirror this entrapment. Colonel John Sartoris lived during a period of tremendous change; during the course of a few short years certain codes and traditions suddenly lost their content and their meaning. Yet, Sartoris attempted to continue his life as if these codes and traditions were still binding and meaningful. As a result he was a man living out of his time, and his actions, based not on reality but on illusion,

resulted both in a violation of moral law and in his own death.

His son, Bayard, attempts to come to grips with the changing times and with the forces that destroyed his father. He refuses to honor the meaningless husks of those traditions and codes. Apparently he is successful, for he does not die in a trap of his own devising as do the other Sartoris descendants.

However, in Flags in the Dust, Bayard is caught up in the flow of consequences that surrounds his two grandsons, John and Young Bayard. Evidently, Bayard's understanding of history and its effects is not passed on through his son to his two grandsons. John is killed in combat during World War I in a fashion that is very reminiscent of those courses of action Colonel John Sartoris took during the Civil War. Upon his return from the war, Young Bayard exhibits his failure to comprehend history through his evident feelings of unexpiated guilt and through his apparent drive toward self-destruction. In his attempts to rid himself of the guilt feelings, he manages to kill his grandfather in an automobile accident and later to dispose of himself in an airplane which he knows is unsafe.

Faulkner details the story of the McCaslin family primarily in Go Down, Moses. In this work, it is evident that the original violation of moral law took the form of slavery and all its attendant abuses by Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, the patriarch of the McCaslin family in

Yoknapatawpha County. McCaslin's violation stems from the fact that he used slavery to take advantage of someone in an inferior social position.

The fact of interracial sex and the mixing of blood is both a source of pride and a source of embarrassment to his descendants. It is also the source of much of the conflict that develops between the black and white carriers of that blood. That original act by McCaslin is repeated by his descendants and compounded by incest, thus assuring that the flow of consequences from that first act is perpetuated.

Several of the descendants attempt to expiate for the crimes of McCaslin. Amodeus and Theophilus, Uncle Buddy and Uncle Buck, try to absolve their part in the consequences through a farce involving locked doors and open windows in the plantation house where the slaves are quartered. Also, these slaves are offered an opportunity to earn their freedom through a type of share-cropper arrangement.

Isaac McCaslin, the final carrier of the purer strain of McCaslin blood, attempts expiation through a repudiation of all things McCaslin. He owns nothing; even the house in which he sleeps belongs to his wife. Furthermore, he has no children so that there will be none of the McCaslin line left for the sins of Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin to fall upon.

The remaining family of quality in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha is the Compson family. Possibly the original Compson violation lies in the purchase of a huge tract of

land by Jason Compson from Ikkemotubbe, the last Chickasaw chief in that area. That tract of land was so huge that possibly the horse for which it was traded could not have paced the boundaries in a day, and obviously Jason Compson had taken advantage of someone in an inferior social position.

The flow of consequences from that violation is documented in The Sound and the Fury. By the time the twentieth century opens, the Compson family is crumbling slowly, and the land that once covered such a huge area has shrunk to a few pitiful acres. Jason Richmond Lycurgus Compson III, head of the family, has none of the fire that burned in the original Jason. He is a man who lacks initiative and will, failing even to hold his own family together. His wife seems unable to cope with reality, and each of the children is flawed in some fashion.

Quentin's difficulties have been discussed earlier in this paper. Candice, Quentin's sister, turns to promiscuity and bears an unwanted child. That child, also named Quentin, shows every sign of following her mother's example. Jason IV, the second son, is consumed by greed and a desire to restore the family to its former social position. The final son, Benjamin, afflicted and sorrowful, seems to mourn the fate of the entire family.

There is one other family that Faulkner portrays in his Yoknapatawpha saga. The Snopes family weasels its way into the life of the county. Beginning with Ab Snopes, they

run riot through assorted names and occupations with no end to their growth in sight. Blind and ignorant, they seem destined to rule Yoknapatawpha County. Although they lack the sensitivity to understand or even question their lot in life, they seem destined to commit the same sins, the same violations of moral law. Future generations will suffer the same curses and consequences that have already afflicted the higher social orders.

The consequences of past actions swirl and flow around these Yoknapatawpha families. That fact is a thing they hold in common. It gives them a commonality of experience, and this commonality along with the overlapping of consequences from one family to another results in a force which binds these families together.

The bonding action of the consequences results in community. This factor, much more than geographical location, forms the Sutpen, Compson, McCaslin, Sartoris, and Snopes families and all the other persons dwelling in that area into one homogeneous group. Consequences do not stop at county lines, and Yoknapatawpha is bound in the same fashion to the state of Mississippi, and the state of Mississippi is bound to the rest of the South. This bonding continues until the whole world is caught up in the flow of consequences from the past.

This universality is what Faulkner was speaking of when he stated that his homeland was worthy of being written about. By writing of Yoknapatawpha he was, in a larger

sense, writing of the world and of mankind. That man must endure is evident, for man must endure that awesome flow of consequences. Faulkner also stated that man would prevail; I think he meant that man would first have to understand and accept the meaning of history.

END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Hyatt H. Waggoner, William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), p. 254.

<sup>2</sup>Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 295.

<sup>3</sup>William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (New York: The Modern Library, 1964), p. 261.

<sup>4</sup>James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-1962 (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 70.

<sup>5</sup>Meriwether and Millgate, p. 255.

<sup>6</sup>Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., Faulkner in the University (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 139.

<sup>7</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 243.

<sup>8</sup>Olga W. Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p. 255.

<sup>9</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup>Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 318.

<sup>16</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 132.

<sup>17</sup>Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 174.



- 18 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 174.
- 19 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, pp. 372-373.
- 20 Waggoner, p. 203.
- 21 William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses (New York: The Modern Library, 1942), p. 171.
- 22 Vickery, p. 250.
- 23 Richard Pourier, "'Strange Gods' in Jefferson, Mississippi: Analysis of Absalom, Absalom!," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Absalom, Absalom!, ed. Arnold Goldman (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 225.
- 24 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, pp. 21-22.
- 25 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 143.
- 26 Pourier, p. 223.
- 27 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 140.
- 28 Pourier, p. 224.
- 29 Waggoner, p. 158.
- 30 Vickery, p. 89.
- 31 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 101.
- 32 William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York: The Modern Library, 1956), p. 335.
- 33 Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 336.
- 34 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 96.
- 35 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 109.
- 36 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 100.
- 37 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 100.
- 38 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 361.
- 39 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 207.
- 40 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 334.

- 41 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, pp. 261-262.
- 42 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 280.
- 43 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, p. 335.
- 44 Hershel Parker, "What Quentin Saw 'Out There'," Mississippi Quarterly, XXVII (Summer, 1974), pp. 323-326.
- 45 Cleanth Brooks, "The Narrative Structure of Absalom, Absalom!," The Georgia Review, XXIX (Summer, 1975), pp. 390-391.
- 46 Brooks, "The Narrative Structure of Absalom, Absalom!," pp. 366-394.
- 47 Waggoner, pp. 162-163.
- 48 Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country, pp. 436-437.
- 49 Brooks, "The Narrative Structure of Absalom, Absalom!," p. 388.
- 50 Brooks, "The Narrative Structure of Absalom, Absalom!," p. 389.
- 51 Brooks, "The Narrative Structure of Absalom, Absalom!," pp. 386-387.
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(Biographical Sketch)

I was born April 2, 1945 in South Boston, Virginia. My parents, John Allen and Hazel Clark Lovelace, operate a tobacco farm in Halifax County where I grew up.

From 1951 through 1963, I attended public schools in Halifax County. Following graduation from Halifax County Senior High School in 1963, I attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, where I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. I began work on the master's degree program at Longwood College in 1973.

I was married to the former Carole Owen in June of 1968, and we now live in Halifax County with our two daughters, Marcia Lynn and Sara Catherine. I have been employed by the Halifax County School Board as a teacher of eighth and ninth grade English since the fall of 1968.

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