"I AM GOING TO HAVE TO HEAR IT ALL OVER AGAIN": THE ENTRAPMENT OF QUENTIN COMPSON

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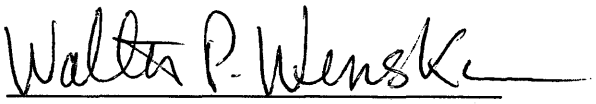

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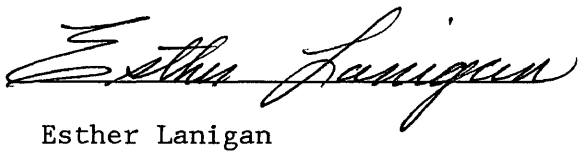

Esther Lanigan

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ABSTRACT

Different narratives are constantly produced and re-produced in Absalom, Absalom!, as various narrators attempt to interpret the diverse events that constitute the Sutpen family saga. All of these stories are channelled through Quentin Compson, who is not only the key link in the narrative chain, the person to whom the chronicle is transmitted and through whom it is passed on, but also an integral participant in the final events of the saga. In the first chapter he is portrayed as being constituted by the tales of "back-looking ghosts" (9), and his sense of being trapped within these fictions intensifies during the course of the novel. He is drawn into adding his own narratives to those already existing because the relationship between Henry Sutpen, Charles Bon, and Judith Sutpen seems to be a synecdoche for his own life, perhaps offering both an explanation for past actions and a paradigm for future ones. Unfortunately, however, as he becomes more and more involved in the workings out of the story-cycle, both as a narrator of it and a late actor in it, his own life becomes a synecdoche for the earlier story which in turn simply mirrors and echoes previous narratives. Consequently, he ultimately perceives himself as trapped within a repetitively deterministic universe composed of an endless cycle of narrative production.

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THE ENTRAPMENT OF QUENTIN COMPSON

INTRODUCTION

Different narratives are constantly produced and re-produced in Absalom, Absalom!, as various narrators attempt to interpret the diverse events that constitute the Sutpen family saga. All of these stories are channelled through Quentin Compson, who is not only the key link in the narrative chain, the person to whom the chronicle is transmitted and through whom it is passed on, but also an integral participant in the final events of the saga. In the first chapter he is portrayed as being constituted by the tales of "back-looking ghosts" (9), and his sense of being trapped within these fictions intensifies during the course of the novel. He is drawn into adding his own narratives to those already existing because the relationship between Henry Sutpen, Charles Bon, and Judith Sutpen seems to be a synecdoche for his own life, perhaps offering both an explanation for past actions and a paradigm for future ones. Unfortunately, however, as he becomes more and more involved in the workings out of the story-cycle, both as a narrator of it and a late actor in it, his own life becomes a synecdoche for the earlier story which in turn simply mirrors and echoes previous narratives. Consequently, he ultimately perceives himself as trapped within a repetitively deterministic universe composed of an endless cycle of narrative production.

This essay examines how and why Quentin becomes increasingly

engaged in the creation of the narratives and delineates the consequences that this greater involvement has upon him. The first section analyzes Chapter One, showing how Quentin is portrayed as being formed by the constant story-telling process that makes up the world he inhabits. Since Quentin is shown to be fashioned by these stories, as he gradually becomes more immersed in Rosa's narration he is depicted as drifting in and out of her voice, a depiction that subverts the teller/tellee relationship and, furthermore, reveals his selfhood or identity as fluid and unstable, rather than fixed and autonomous.

The second section examines the next four chapters, in which the boundaries between past, present, and future begin to merge as Quentin's own life mirrors past narratives and his future seems condemned to repeat them. In these chapters Quentin, sensing correspondences between the Charles-Henry-Judith plot and his own life, increasingly dwells on this triangle, projecting upon it his own concerns and preoccupations. At the end of Chapter Five he is confronted with the knowledge that he is about to participate in a narrative he thought was finished.

The third section concentrates on Chapters Six and Seven in which Quentin realizes that he has brought the world of continuous fiction-making to Harvard with him and that he has initiated Shreve into it. As past, present, and future events interweave, Quentin becomes aware that actions seem dependent upon previously told, presently told, and subsequently told stories, with the result that nothing ever seems to end or begin because every narrative, every action, is immediately followed by another whose ending and beginning is elsewhere. Since this conclusion devalues the importance and meaning of his own life-story, he

attempts to distance himself from its effects by avoiding the love-triangle, the part of the Sutpen narrative that is most personally relevant.

The final section explores the last two chapters in which Quentin's attempt at detachment ultimately fails. As they re-tell the Charles-Henry-Judith story in Chapter Eight, Quentin and Shreve are portrayed as having an existence only within the narrative voice, their selves dissolved into it. At the end of the chapter, however, Shreve is able to distance himself geographically and historically from the story by bringing it to a climax that creates a securely closed and bounded tale. This strategy of disengagement is not possible for Quentin and in Chapter Nine he is confronted with the fact that the climax to his own life-story has already been told. Trapped by the realization that no action can initiate or conclude anything, he despairingly recognizes that there is no solution for, can be no resolution to, his own problems.

I

In Chapter One Quentin becomes progressively more involved in Rosa's narration and the fictional worlds of story-telling of which her narrative is a part. He is presented as being fashioned by the narratives of a ghostly past, a past whose tales make up the world he inhabits and grew up in. Since his selfhood is constituted by these ghosts and their stories, it is shown to be fluid and, therefore, when Rosa begins her tale the theoretical division between narrator and narratee, between two separate and autonomous beings, breaks down, revealing the interdependence of the teller and tellee in narrative

creation. She is one of the ghosts and is telling one of the tales that form Quentin. Quentin drifts in and out of her narration as he listens to her

> talking in that grim haggard amazed voice until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound and the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration would appear as though by outraged recapitulation evoked, quiet inattentive and harmless, out of the biding and dreamy and victorious dust. (4)

Like a card-player who refuses to follow the rules of the game [**Renege**. 4. a. Card-playing. To refuse or fail to follow suit; to revoke.] Quentin breaks the hypothetical narrative contract [4. c. To break one's word; to go back *on* a promise or undertaking or contract; to disappoint expectations. orig. and chiefly *U.S.*] by refusing to be a separate and separable narratee.[1] The next phrase, "hearing-sense self-confound," with its reflexive verb construction, reinforces this idea. Both his sense of hearing and his sense of what he is hearing subvert themselves [**Confound**. 1. b. To overthrow, defeat, or bring to nought], causing him to use a different sense -- sight -- and he sees Sutpen, who is now the newly arisen ghostly subject of his vision, rather than the "long-dead object of her . . . frustration" (4). It is the fact of his listening, paradoxically, that causes him to move from the position of hearer to that of visualizer. Both the sense of sight and hearing intermingle, as well as the sense of speech, as Quentin drifts into her narration: "Her voice would not cease, it would just vanish" (4). [**Confound**. 6. To mix up or mingle so that the elements become difficult to distinguish or impossible to separate.] Furthermore, Quentin's visualization of Rosa's narration of Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson (she is never actually shown telling it) mixes together what were in fact two arrivals [**Confound**. 7.

To mix up an idea, erroneously regard or treat as identical, fail to distinguish.] since, according to Quentin's father, Sutpen arrived first on his own and only later with the French architect and slaves.[2]

The importance of repetition in narrative production is emphasized, for the ghost "appear[s]," is "evoked" "by outraged recapitulation" (4); Rosa is condemned to dwell constantly upon Sutpen and her role in his saga and, with Quentin as her narratee, she repeats her version of his and her life in one afternoon [**Recapitulation.** 1. a. The act of recapitulating; a summing up or brief repetition]. "Recapitulation" also suggests that the separate roles of teller and tellee are merging, and provides as well the explicit notion that the senses of speech and hearing ("voice"/"listening") have converged to produce the sense of sight [**Recapitulation.** 2. A gathering together into one].[3] Repetition is an integral part of the world that Quentin and Rosa inhabit. The setting in which Rosa's narration takes place is described in similar words twice in the first two pages, the first time by what seems to be an impersonal narrator: "From a little after two oclock until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield called the office because her father called it that," "a dim hot airless room" and "[t]here was a wistaria vine blooming for the second time that summer on a wooden trellis before one window, into which sparrows came now and then in random gusts, making a dry vivid dusty sound before going away" (3). The second time the scene is refracted through Quentin's mind. The room is placed in opposition to the flow of Rosa's narration, underscoring the fact that when Quentin sees the ghost he does so by entering her

narration and in a sense leaving the room:

> There would be the dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and oversweet with the twice-bloomed wistaria against the outer wall by the savage quiet september sun . . . into which came now and then the loud cloudy flutter of the sparrows like a flat limber stick whipped by an idle boy . . . and the voice not ceasing but vanishing into and out of the long intervals like a stream, a trickle running from patch to patch of dried sand, and the ghost mused with shadowy docility as if it were the voice which he haunted where a more fortunate one would have had a house. (4)

This passage introduces the recurring motif of water to describe the constant flowing process both of narrative production and of people and their actions. When Quentin eventually creates his own version and explanation of the Charles-Henry-Judith story, he becomes aware that rather than producing one, true interpretation that explains their actions and by analogy posits a solution for his own dilemma, he has in fact simply entered the endless, repetitive universe of language and story-telling. Consequently, he comes to the conclusion that nothing is ever concluded or initiated: whatever action is taken will only be yet another version of a tale already told.

Although Quentin's entrapment is hinted at here, and despite entering her voice's realm, he is able to view Rosa's tale with a distancing eye. Whereas she describes it in an "amazed voice" (4), Quentin watches his imagined tableau, encapsulating her description of Sutpen's arrival, unamazed:

> Then in the long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*. (5)

Quentin strikes an attitude to Rosa's story, regarding her portrayal of

Sutpen as the Anti-Christ with a detached and ironic air. In spite of Quentin's attempt to make her tale ironic, however, there is an undeniable sense of power in the passage, arising from the biblical language, which gives Sutpen a heroic stature. It is heroic rather than mythic, because although his creation begins the saga, it is refracted through another, earlier story and an undistanced narrator.[4] For Rosa, Sutpen's blasphemous creation partakes of the power of the original creation; for Quentin, on the other hand, it is an ironic echo of the earlier, "oldentime" creation.

Quentin's partial immersion in Rosa's narration -- as well as the confounding of his senses and of the teller/tellee relationship -- has already implied that his selfhood is fluid as a consequence of being fashioned by different voices. This implication is made explicit when he moves away from this first tableau. As his hearing "reconcile[s]" rather than "renege[s]," there is a partial restoration of a teller/tellee relationship. He becomes a listener once again and no longer envisions Rosa's narration [**Reconcile.** 1. a. *trans.* To bring (a person) again into friendly relations *to* or *with* (oneself or another) after estrangement]. The reconciliation is not of the primary narrator/narratee relationship of him as tellee and Rosa as teller, however, but between various Quentins inside himself:

> 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 the same as she was -- the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople, in

notlanguage[.] (5)

The meaning of this sentence belies its seemingly antithetical structure. [**Reconcile**. 10. a. To make (discordant facts, statements, etc) consistent, accordant, or compatible with each other.] The two Quentins are not separate but a deeply connected pair who are overheard by another. [**Reconcile**. 3. To set (estranged persons or parties) at one again; to bring back into concord, to reunite (persons or things) in harmony.] The first Quentin exists in 1909 and is preparing to leave the South to go North and to his future. He is not simply a contemporary of the 1909 world of Harvard, however; he is also the product of the 1865 world of the deep South. Accordingly, as the second half of the sentence makes clear, he is inevitably a ghost since he has been constituted by ghosts and their tales, but he is "still too young yet to deserve to be a ghost." Thus the deeply connected Quentins are also deeply divided and in conflict.

To this point Quentin has withdrawn from Rosa's telling only to find himself in a situation in which he overhears a conversation taking place within himself, in which neither voice is privileged. These three "Quentins" reinforce the developing notion that the self is fluid rather than fixed, multiple rather than unified, and dependent upon others rather than solitary and self-sufficient. The voices discuss Rosa's version of the Sutpen story and endeavour, unsuccessfully, to keep it at a distance:

> *And married her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter which -- (Without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) -- without gentleness. Which should have been the jewels of his pride and the shield and comfort of his old age, only -- (Only they destroyed him or something or he destroyed them or something. And died) -- and died. Without regret, Miss Rosa Coldfield says -- (Save by her)*

> *Yes, save by her. (And by Quentin Compson) Yes. And by Quentin Compson.* (5-6)

The attempt of the voice in the parentheses to parody or debunk the relating of Rosa's narration ultimately fails. The other voice simply picks up the phrase and repeats it in an unironic manner [**Reconcile.** 9.a. To adjust, settle, bring to agreement (a controversy, quarrel, etc.)]. By the end of the passage the two voices join Rosa in regretting the death of the past [**Reconcile.** 12. to make even or smooth, or fit together so as to present a uniform surface]. The fact that Quentin "was born and bred in the deep South same as she was" circumvents his effort to create an ironic distance between himself and Rosa. All the differences between them dissolve in a similar emotional response to a history that is as much his as it is Rosa's. [**Reconcile.** 11. a. To make (an action, condition, quality, etc.) compatible or consistent in fact or in one's mind *with* another; to regard as consistent *with*.][5]

Faulkner makes clear that Quentin and Rosa inhabit a world made up of stories and made from them; the South is "peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts." Quentin already knows the "first part" of the Sutpen story, or rather the first part of Rosa's narration of the Sutpen story (his arrival into Jefferson), because it is a part of his inheritance:

> It was a part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man; a part of the town's -- Jefferson's -- eighty years' heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed between this September afternoon in 1909 and that Sunday morning in June in 1833[.] (9)

His heritage is not only geographic but also linguistic; he acquired it as much from hearing his father tell stories about Sutpen as from breathing in its air. An inevitable consequence of growing up in this story-telling world is that he, too, is constituted by the same tales and names:

> [T]he mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad. 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. (9-10)

Since Quentin's self is made up of ghosts, it is clear that there is no one self that he can oppose to them. He is here revealed not only to be a ghost himself, a repetition of the earlier description but also to contain within himself all the ghosts. His very body is the body-politic of this dead and ghostly state. The "disease" in terms of the ante-bellum South is slavery; crucial events in the novel show its moral repugnance: Sutpen's move from the pastoral Eden of west Virginia; his rejection by the house slave; his repudiation of his first wife; his refusal, as narrated by Shreve and Quentin, to acknowledge Charles; Henry's reaction, as portrayed by Mr. Compson (although denied by Shreve and Quentin) to Charles's octoroon mistress; and, most terribly, Henry's shooting of Charles (as conceived by Shreve and Quentin) to prevent not incest but miscegenation. The fever, therefore, is the Civil War since afterwards the South was powerless to propagate its "diseased" society

in any meaningful sense -- Jim Crow laws are a pale reflection of slavery.[6]

Since Rosa is the particular ghost he is listening to, this passage also directly refers to her. For her, the disease is Sutpen and the fever is his insulting of her in 1866 and his subsequent death three years later. Rosa's regret is that she is unable to participate in the events of the narrative any more: "[M]y life was destined to end on an afternoon in April forty-three years ago" (17), and later she curses Sutpen's death for ending the tale without her: "'Dead?', I cried. 'Dead? You? You lie; you're not dead; heaven cannot, and hell dare not, have you!'" (215). By being removed from the actual progression of narrative events she regards herself as being free of them, placed in a position outside them. Accordingly, she views it as an unattractive type of freedom because it is one of impotence: she has ceased to be an actor in the events and can only re-tell them in such a way as to highlight her own role and her notion of the story's meaning. Her very act of narrating the events to Quentin, however, resurrects the story and, together with her suspicion that something is in the house, enables her to re-enter the story and become an actor once again.[7]

Connected to the ghosts of the past through their tales, Quentin recalls his father's suggestion that the reason why Rosa wants to speak to him is because of the way stories are transmitted from generation to generation. Mr. Compson informs him that he is linked to the tale by blood; Quentin is implicated in his grandfather's deeds because of the umbilical cord of language:

> And she chose you because your grandfather was the nearest thing to a friend which Sutpen ever had in this country, and she probably believes that Sutpen may have told your

> grandfather something about himself and her . . . And that your grandfather might have told me and I might have told you. And so, in a sense, the affair, no matter what happens out there tonight, will still be in the family . . . She may believe that if it hadn't been for your grandfather's friendship, Sutpen could never have got a foothold here . . . So maybe she considers you partly responsible through hereditary for what happened to her and her family through him. (10-11)

The tie is language: his grandfather might have told his son something who might have told his son something. Original sin is transmitted through social intercourse as well as sexual.[8]

As Rosa's narration proceeds, detailing the crimes of the original sinner, the substantiality of Quentin's picture of Sutpen is shown to grow in direct correlation to her voice's disappearance:

> Meanwhile, as though in inverse ratio to the vanishing voice, the invoked ghost of the man she could neither forgive nor revenge herself upon began to assume a quality almost of solidity, permanence. (11)

As the other members of Sutpen's family appear, Quentin's picture becomes sharper: "[T]he ogre shape which, as Miss Coldfield's voice went on, resolved out of itself before Quentin's eyes the two half-ogre children, the three of them forming a shadowy background for the fourth one. This was the mother, the dead sister Ellen: this Niobe without tears . . . " (11-12). The tellee/teller relationship continues to be subverted as Rosa's narration cannot be read by the reader, but only deduced from Quentin's imagining of it. This imagining is interpreted through the filter of another story, the myth of Niobe, but the revision of making her "untearful" suggests yet another fiction, one more directly important to Quentin since it refers to Hamlet's sarcastic comment about his mother.[9] Hamlet is clearly a story that would resonate with Quentin because of its incestuous theme, and because

Hamlet's dilemma of whether to act or not to act -- whether the action be one of revenge, or one of defending family honor, or one of suicide -- is similar to how Quentin sees his own predicament in The Sound And The Fury. Accordingly, in Chapter Six Quentin will re-view Henry's confrontation with the half-naked Judith through the lens of Hamlet.[10]

The fact that Quentin is interpreting her narration through another story more immediately important to him intimates that he is becoming less distanced; his decreasing detachment is shown as the family group becomes clearer:

> Quentin seemed to see them, the four of them arranged into the conventional family group of the period, with formal and lifeless decorum, and seen now as the fading and ancient photograph itself would have been seen enlarged and hung on the wall behind and above the voice and of whose presence there the voice's owner was not even aware, as if she (Miss Coldfield) had never seen this room before[.] (12)

Whereas the earlier image of Sutpen was firmly situated within Rosa's voice, "as if it were the voice which he haunted," this family tableau is separate from her telling. Indeed, it seems as if she is not even in the room in which Quentin is envisioning the tale. In creating his own version of Rosa's story, Quentin is moving from tellee to teller. But the symbiotic nature of the relationship is emphasized, for both of them are needed to produce the picture: "a group the last member of which had been dead twenty-five years and the first, fifty, evoked now out of the airless gloom of a dead house between an old woman's grim and implacable unforgiving and the passive chafing of a youth of twenty" (12). The sentence continues with Quentin talking to himself, but there is no longer an observing Quentin, just two Quentins, a teller and a tellee, speaking *within* Rosa's voice:

> telling himself even amid the voice . . . And maybe it (the

> voice, the talking, the incredulous and unbearable amazement) had been a cry aloud once, Quentin thought, long ago when she was a girl -- of young and indomitable unregret, of indictment of blind circumstance and savage event; but not now: now only the lonely thwarted old female flesh embattled for forty-three years in the old insult, the old unforgiving outraged and betrayed by the final and complete affront which was Sutpen's death[.] (12-13)

The solitary, isolated cry is superseded and deadened by being repeatedly depicted and, as such, it ceases to be an individual, separate moment and becomes part of an endless process. Rosa is betrayed by Sutpen's death because she played no part in it and her avenger was a man she despised. Therefore, any connection between her cry and his death has to be made through interpretation, not by action.

Rosa's narration moves towards what she portrays as one of the crucial events in her life. This one occurs when her sister told her to protect Judith and she interprets the appeal teleologically, suggesting that she responded to Ellen's cry by saying: "Protect her? From whom and from what? He has already given them life: he does not need to harm them further. It is from themselves that they need protection" (22). This hinting at the shooting leads to a description of Quentin becoming deeply entwined into her telling:

> 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, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend 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. (22-23)

The key to Rosa's effect on Quentin is not the story she is narrating, but her narrating of the story; the telling rather than the tale. The sentence extends the ideas of weaving and flowing. Like all narrations,

Rosa's is an artificial and selective construct, created essentially by excluding things, and yet its success depends, paradoxically, upon an awareness of this fact. Surrounding everything is the constant flowing movement of elapsed and elapsing time from which one can isolate certain moments, tableaux, but their very existence depends upon the fact of the constant narrative flow of repetition and recapitulation.[11]

This idea, which is essential to an understanding of the process that Quentin undergoes in the novel, is exemplified by the ending of Chapter One and the beginning of Chapter Two. Chapter One ends with a resounding climax, imagined and created by Rosa, which posits a particular way of looking at the story. It is very much a tale of the mixing of families and of races as she imagines Henry, Clytie, and Judith all watching Sutpen fighting one of his slaves:

> "But I was not there. I was not there to see the two Sutpen faces this time -- once on Judith and once on the negro girl beside her -- looking down through the square entrance to the loft." (33)

This ending immediately sets up patterns of oppositions with which to interpret the text: Coldfield/Sutpen, Henry/Judith, white/black and so on. A narration also inevitably reflects the preoccupation of its narrator and, thus, it can be seen to reflect Rosa's sexual frustration, or her shock at being touched by Clytie, or her horror at Judith's behavior after Charles's shooting, or her dwelling on stories told to her about Sutpen and her subsequent producing of narratives in which she participates and which correspond to her view of him. At the same time any conclusive interpretation is denied since she is aware that she is engaged in producing imaginary reconstructions of events she took no part in.

As a new narration begins in Chapter Two, however, her climax is immediately displaced. This displacement happens at the culmination of every single narrative in Absalom, Absalom!. Rosa is aware of this when, after telling Quentin of Judith's reaction to the news that Charles has been shot by Henry, she says:

> *That was all. Or rather, not all, since there is no all, no finish; it is not the blow we suffer from but the tedious repercussive anti-climax of it, the rubbishy aftermath to clear away from off the very threshold of despair.* (187)

Although each successive story that is related leads to a climax proffered by the narrator as the telos through which the events can be satisfactorily interpreted, these climactic moments, these "blows," never end the story-telling process. Instead they are supplanted, as they are repeated, alluded to, or built upon in the following narrative whose ending is elsewhere. The same thing happens to the ending of this subsequent story in turn, however, and to the next one and to the next, in an endless cycle of narrative production.[12] (Indeed many critics assert that the true telos of Absalom, Absalom! is in another novel entirely and that it can only be read through the lens of Quentin's suicide in The Sound And The Fury.[13]) The novel itself, however, refuses to allow Quentin or the reader the security of a teleogenic reading -- a desire that the very form of the novel, that of a detective story, encourages.[14] Crucially, the central mystery is a "whydunit" not a "whodunit" -- why did Henry kill Charles, not who killed Charles -- and therefore there can be no definitive solution since different psychological motives can link the events together and these are projected upon the events by the narrators of them, not the actors in them.[15] Furthermore, the search for answers is displaced as it becomes

both an investigation of the Sutpen saga and an investigation of why the telling of it has such an enormous effect upon Quentin.[16] Quentin, through meeting Henry and through the imaginative creation Shreve forces him to construct, is confronted with various conclusions as to why Henry shot Charles, none of which provides a meaningful telos on which to center his own life and future actions. As Rosa suggests, to climax, to conclude, is always to lose hope; for as narrators constantly sweep away the "rubbishy aftermath" and draw near to another new ending, what they glimpse before the ending's displacement is despair, the knowledge that the climax will not finish the story. Quentin, therefore, is confronted with the fact that any climax he seeks to reach ends in hopelessness, and with the despairing realization that life is always an anti-climax, that nothing is ever finished or begun, that to narrate is necessarily to repeat. His own life then becomes a mirror of Henry's, which in turn simply mirrors previous stories; the meaning of one's story, of one's life, is thus always elsewhere.

II

During the course of the next four chapters, all of which take place in Mississippi, Quentin becomes increasingly preoccupied with the Charles-Henry-Judith story and, unprovoked by Rosa or Mr Compson, he starts to visualize certain of its events. This is a prelude to his producing his own narratives as he begins to concentrate on particular aspects of the narrations he is listening to that correspond to his own concerns and preoccupations. As he does so, the distinctions between past and present continue to merge, to be confounded, until, finally, he is about to become a participant in the Sutpen family narratives.

Echoing the two descriptions of the Mississippi scene in the previous chapter, Chapter Two opens with a return to the repetitive world of narrative production which Rosa and Quentin inhabit: fireflies replace the sparrows, as night falls:

> It was a summer of wistaria. The twilight was full of it and of the smell of his father's cigar as they sat on the front gallery after supper until it would be time for Quentin to start, while in the deep shaggy lawn below the veranda the fireflies blew and drifted in soft random[.] (34)

There is an emphasis on the entwining of past, present, and future by the process of narration as the smell of wistaria in September 1909 is textually induced into the cold of Harvard in 1910:

> the odor, the scent, which five months later Mr. Compson's letter would carry up from Mississippi and over the long iron New England snow and into Quentin's sitting-room at Harvard. (34)

His father is about to embark on his own interpretation of events and Quentin is destined to hear once again the story of Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson; again the emphasis is on hearing, on the story being an inescapable part of his heritage:

> It was a day of listening too -- the listening, the hearing in 1909 even yet mostly that which he already knew since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells had rung 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 paint-smears on the soft summer sky)[.] (34)

Quentin hardly responds to his father's narration in Chapters Two and Three, which suggests that he is not engaged by Mr. Compson's version, perhaps because he has heard it so often before. Like Rosa, and like Quentin eventually, indeed like all the story-tellers in the novel, Mr. Compson shapes his tale according to a pre-conceived, culturally-

assimilated, story-form.[17] For Rosa, Sutpen is a vision of the anti-Christ, who was condemned, as was the entire South, by a hell-fire Presbyterian god for his sins. Her difficulty with the story, as evidenced by her constant return to it, is that the ending with which she patterns her narrative is displaced as soon as it occurs. The apocalypse was only an image of the promised end not the end itself; she remained alive and Sutpen was killed by the despised figure of Wash Jones.

Mr. Compson, on the other hand, as many have noted, views the past as a sort of Greek tragedy with ancient heroes and a destructive Fate, adding his own ironic filter.[18] When Shreve retells in Chapter Six the version of Sutpen's death as presumably told him by Quentin, who was told it, in turn, by his father, it becomes clear that Mr. Compson has constructed his narration around the ironic symbolism of this ending. Sutpen's end satisfies him because it affirms his belief in the essentially sardonic workings of the "illogical machinations" of fate; revising Gloucester's words in King Lear, he comments:[19]

> [It was] just a little more of the illogical machinations of a fatality which had chosen that family in preference to any other in the county or the land exactly as a small boy chooses one ant-hill to pour boiling water into in preference to any other, not even himself knowing why. (125-6)

This belief enables him to be content with his unconvincing explanation of why Henry shot Charles: the fact that it does not make sense supports his view of the way the world works:

> It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they dont explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; . . . we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions,

> performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable . . . you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure 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. (124)

In the second half of the book, however, the complex interaction between Quentin and Shreve will make the opposite happen: violence and passion are shown to be both complex and explicable. Indeed they are explicable precisely because the motives and reasons behind them are still present and problematic. Quentin's own life, for example, echoes and mirrors the past in crucial ways. The traumatic effect of the Harvard re-creation on Quentin disavows Mr. Compson's world-weary and resigned contention that since history is always an imaginative reconstruction made by a present that, more or less credibly, tries to explain the events of the past, the past cannot matter. It is precisely because the past is imaginatively reconstructed by present narrators that the story is so destructive to Quentin. By seeing in it his own concerns and problems, which are still active and demand action of some sort or another, he is made to examine it for clues as to how to resolve his own life, but by so doing he discovers that his own life seems to have entered the same cycle of never-ending production of stories of which the Sutpen saga is a part.

This idea of the complex interwovenness of the world is elucidated and extended in Judith's speech to Quentin's grandmother. The substance of this speech is questionable since it has had to travel from the latter, presumably to Quentin's grandfather, and then from him to Quentin's father and thence to Quentin. Furthermore, it has already

been revealed that Quentin's grandmother has previously been reticent about repeating a conversation that upset her, as Quentin's father says of her reaction to Rosa's aunt's visit: "Mother was a stranger in Jefferson and I dont know what she thought except that she would never talk about what happened" (64). Given the personal nature of the narratives in the novel, one surmises that Mr. Compson is speaking through Judith for his own present-day reasons. Her belief in both the uselessness of action but the necessity of continuing is exactly the message that he tries to inculcate in Quentin during their conversations, as remembered by Quentin, in The Sound And The Fury.[20] Unfortunately the idea that Judith expresses, or Mr. Compson has Judith express, has a greater application to Quentin and consequently a deeper resonance and effect upon him then his father can imagine:

> You get born and you try this and you dont know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they dont know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it cant matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it[.] (157)

The belief in the interconnection of people, of every person being entwined and interlinked with every other person (thus precluding the possibility of independent action generated by a central, unified self) helps explain why the effect of the Harvard re-creation is so catastrophic on Quentin: everyone he is, or becomes connected to, is

dead, or lives in the past, or during the course of the book becomes the past (himself included) or, in Shreve's and his father's cases, helps him re-create the past. This linguistic process by which Quentin becomes inescapably bound to ghosts, causing their present to become a part of his present and his future to be determined by their past, is also linked to the idea that only something that can die can be alive, that a prerequisite of being an *is* is the possibility of being a *was*. A consequence of this belief is that past, present, and future are fluid, merge with one another, and are dependent upon one another. Judith introduces, or Mr. Compson has Judith introduce, this idea as she hands the letter over to Quentin's grandmother:

> And so maybe if you could go to someone . . . and give them something -- a scrap of paper -- something, anything . . . at least it would be something just because it would have happened . . . and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that *was* once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone cant be *is* because it never can become *was* because it cant ever die or perish[.] (158)

Once Quentin goes out to Sutpen's Hundred he is part of the action of the Sutpen story and so becomes an *is* within it. Therefore once the story finishes, becomes a *was*, he, as one of its constituent parts, becomes a *was* too, unless he re-tells the story. When Shreve forces him to do this, he realizes that no story is ever completed or distinct from other stories, his future actions are an integral part of past actions and his life is condemned to repeat the story patterns of the past.

The coupling of past and present continues as Mr. Compson gives his son Charles's letter to read. Living narrators attempt to re-read, which is shown to mean re-write, the past in terms of the present, but at the same time the past, with its language, stories, myths, determines

how the present, the past's future, will, or indeed can, read the past.[21] For Quentin, the letter is not some indecipherable, archaeological document. It is something which has the power to impact time itself into one luminous moment of present. His reaction to the letter is similar to the one he had to Rosa's story-telling. The letter is compressed into one single, fragile moment of time whose reality is dependent on the awareness of elapsed and elapsing time:

> Quentin hearing without having to listen as he read the faint spidery script not like something impressed upon the paper by a once-living hand but like a shadow cast upon it which had resolved on the paper the instant before he looked at it and which might fade, vanish, at any instant while he still did[.] (160)

This perception continues and extends the ideas in Judith's earlier speech. The letter appears only to have its existence within Quentin's imagination, but it is alive because it can disappear, can become a *was*. Similarly, Charles is a living ghost, not an inert corpse, created by Quentin's act of reading. The very nature of a letter confounds the various time periods because a letter's present is both the time when it is written and the time when it is read. Furthermore, a letter-writer writes with the knowledge that his present will be his reader's past and composes his letter bearing this fact in mind. In other words, the present of his writing is affected by the future, and the present of the reader is affected by the writer's present, the past.[22] Charles plays with these ideas within his letter. He writes: "*I do not add, expect me. Because I cannot say when to expect me. Because what* WAS *is one thing and now it is not because it is dead, it died in 1861, and therefore what* IS--" and he then interrupts his chain of thought by describing his immediate present: "There. They have started firing

again" (162). He finds himself unable to construct a version of the future because he regards his past, "the old South which is dead," as irretrievably gone, "*I cannot say when to expect me. Because what* IS *is something else again because it was not even alive then*" (163). Unfortunately, this is not true; his past will dictate his future and by ignoring it he finishes the letter tragically in error: *"I now believe that you and I are, strangely enough, included among those who are doomed to live"* (163).[23] The future also affects and changes the past. Mr. Compson's narration of Judith's speech to his mother creates a filter through which to interpret the letter, whilst the letter, in turn, provides a means to interpret both her speech and Mr. Compson's narration. It is clear that whoever actually said what Judith is reported as saying, whether she herself did or Mr. Compson, the notion was obtained from this verifiable historical document.[24]

The misjudgment of the letter's ending lends itself to a type of ironic reading beloved of Mr. Compson, and he, accordingly, recounts the events immediately leading up to the shooting. The murder energizes Quentin's imagination as the chapter ends with his visualizing the final confrontation. Clearly, as anyone who has read The Sound and the Fury and as the reader learns in Chapter Five, the Charles-Henry-Judith triangle holds deep significance for Quentin, mirroring events in his own life, and enabling him to imagine a different ending to his own confrontation with his sister's lover. (Significantly, and not surprisingly, Quentin seems less interested than Mr. Compson in the relationships involving Sutpen, Ellen, and Rosa.) Rather than fainting and being humiliated by Dalton Ames, he can vicariously triumph through

Henry by imagining him shooting Charles. His visualization is far more vivid than any of those he has previously had, as shown by the use of the qualifier "actually" in the introductory sentence: "It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see them, facing one another at the gate" (164). Like the Sutpen apparition of Chapter One, "evoked" by Rosa "out of the biding and dreamy and victorious dust" (4), the vision is initially a static tableau. But now that it is being created solely by Quentin, with little reference to the narrator's voice, it begins to come to life, as if the past and its inhabitants are awakening from anaesthesia:

> 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[.] (164)

The sense that the past is resurrecting by its being created by Quentin is increased because the vision climaxes with dialogue, producing the effect of both mobility and life:

> [T]he one with the tarnished braid of the officer, the other plain of cough, the pistol lying yet across the saddle bow unaimed, the two faces calm, the voices not even raised: *Dont you pass the shadow of this post, this branch, Charles;* and *I am going to pass it, Henry*[.] (165)

Quentin is brought back to the present of Mr. Compson's narrative with his father's portrayal of Wash Jones's arrival at Rosa's. In addition, this description projects Quentin into the future since he is about to join Rosa in a repeat performance of her earlier journey. Quentin's world is being shown to be increasingly one of repetition and recapitulation, one in which the various time spheres combine. His father first told his son of Wash's arrival at the beginning of Chapter Three, causing Quentin to imagine Rosa getting ready to leave for the

mansion in 1909, and now the narrative drive of the present is disrupted as Quentin remembers his earlier meeting with Rosa, picking up from Chapter One. There is a growing echoing and re-echoing of events in the past with events in the present and they are beginning to merge within Quentin's consciousness as the boundaries between teller, tellee, and actor become confounded.

The fifth chapter continues Rosa's diatribe from the first and begins from Wash's arrival at her house. Her effect upon Quentin is far more powerful than his father's and, because it is more personally motivated, Quentin's vision of the shooting in this chapter is correspondingly more realistic and life-like.[25] It is not introduced with a phrase suggesting he is observing, but with one which links him to a central participant, Charles Bon: "But Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which he too could not pass . . ." (215). The wording here, echoing his vision at the end of the previous chapter, suggests that this entire chapter is a kind of footnote, a flashback, explaining what is in Quentin's mind, and why, as he listens to Mr. Compson in Chapter Four. Quentin's imagination is focused on Rosa's brief description of the confrontation between Henry and Judith at the beginning of Chapter Five. (Presumably Mr. Compson's discussion of the "perfect incest" (119) would intensify the resonance of the scene for Quentin.) In contrast to Chapter One, when Quentin drifted in and out of Rosa's telling and when what he envisioned was to a great extent determined by her narration, he is now concentrating on one particular aspect of the story, the shooting and the confrontation. The urgency of the vision is clear as it portrays the sexually resonant scene of the

brother, fresh from killing the would-be brother-in-law, confronting his half-naked sister. The feeling of immediacy is intensified by the use of the definite articles, "that . . . the . . . the" etc., producing the feeling that Quentin is remembering events he actually participated in: "that door, the running feet on the stairs beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot, the two women, the negress and the whitegirl in her underthings . . . (215). His fantasy is mobile for the first time, containing both the actual shooting and its immediate aftermath -- the confrontation between Judith and Henry. Again this is clearly a re-writing of Quentin's own unsuccessful confrontation with Dalton Ames and then with his sister, Caddy. It has become a phantasmagoria whose power is increased because it produces the sense that it is coming to a climax, narratively and sexually. But once again the climax is immediately displaced and positioned onto Quentin's 1909 self, as Rosa draws him out of his reverie and ends the chapter by informing him that there is something, or someone, in Sutpen's mansion and that she wants him to go with her to investigate:

> He (Quentin) couldn't pass that. He was not even listening to her; he said, "Ma'am? What's that? What did you say?"
> "There's something in that house."
> "In that house? It's Clytie. Don't she -- "
> "No. Something living in it. Hidden in it. It has been out there for four years, living hidden in that house." (216)

Rosa's belief that there is something in the house and her desire to go out there mean that Quentin is being thrust from a position of passive listener, whose one interest in Rosa's narration seems to be the confrontations that relate to his own problems with Caddy, to that of an active participant. He, like Henry and Charles, will go out to the

house. The resolution to the Sutpen saga seems to lie now in Rosa's and Quentin's journey to the house, which already echoes, or will come to echo, previous journeys: Henry's ride with Charles and subsequent confrontation with Judith, as successively imagined by Quentin; Rosa's 1865 journey to the house with Wash and subsequent confrontation with Clytie, then with Judith; Quentin's journey to the house with friends and subsequent confrontation with Clytie and Jim Bond; and Rosa's final journey to the house, as imagined by Quentin, which leads to the conflagration of the house. The visit that seems to be the key to the story, the crucial one which seems to promise to make sense of it all, confronts Quentin with a despairing image of the avenging brother whose act of revenge concluded nothing.

III

Chapters One to Five lead the reader, finally, to expect as climax Rosa and Quentin's visit to the house, but once again the ending is delayed. Indeed, their journey's culmination is not revealed until the final chapter. Consequently, Quentin's and Rosa's journey, being a chronological progression from the constant repetitious circling of the narrative production in the first five chapters, looms as the promised end to the novel. Quentin will become, then, an essential component in the unfolding now-no-longer-dead Sutpen story, for his actions in that September night in 1909, still unknown to the reader, turn out to be an integral part of its resolution. The time spheres, 1865, 1909, and 1910, become reconciled as Shreve in 1910 recounts parts of the story, told him by Quentin, forcing Quentin into retelling it as well. By the end of Chapter Seven Quentin is increasingly aware that he is trapped

within a fictional world of repetition since he realizes that he has initiated Shreve into the same fluid story-telling world.

Chapter Six begins by echoing the beginning of Chapter Two, which echoed the beginning of Chapter One, making it clear that Quentin has not escaped the repetitive world of narrative production by going north. Moreover, with the connecting "so that" it is made clear that in a sense the future is determined by the past:

> Then on the table before Quentin, lying on the open text book beneath the lamp, the white oblong of envelope, the familiar blurred mechanical *Jefferson Jan 10 1910 Miss* and then, opened, the *My dear son* in his father's sloped fine hand out of that dead dusty summer where he had prepared for Harvard so that his father's hand could lie on a strange lamplit table in Cambridge; that dead summer twilight -- the wistaria, the cigar-smell, the fireflies -- attenuated up from Mississippi and into this strange room, across this strange iron New England snow[.] (141)

Mr. Compson's words provoke a recapitulation of the story as Shreve asks Quentin questions about the newly-arrived letter that recounts Rosa's death. Just as clearly Quentin has been inundated with questions about the South since his arrival at Harvard:

> [(A]nd he soon needing, required, to say "No, neither aunt cousin nor uncle Rosa. Miss Rosa Coldfield, an old lady that died young of outrage in 1866 one summer" and then Shreve, "You mean she was no kin to you, no kin to you at all, that there was actually one Southern Bayard or Guinevere who was no kin to you? then what did she die for?" and that not Shreve's fits time, nobody's first time in Cambridge since September: *Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all.*) (218)

His leaving the South, therefore, has not meant an escape from "back-looking ghosts" and their "sonorous defeated names" (9). In fact, it has meant the opposite: compelled to recount their tales Quentin becomes their spokesman, his body is indeed their "commonwealth" (9). The

letter forces him to look back into his past and to Rosa, now a ghost in reality; it "bring[s] with it that very September evening itself" (218). In particular it brings back the moment when he left his house to meet Rosa for the second time: "-- that very September evening [in 1910] when Mr. Compson stopped talking at last, he (Quentin) walked out of his father's talking at last because it was now time to go" (218). Once again the notion that Quentin is enclosed by and inhabits language, a realm of story-telling, is re-affirmed since he "walks out" of Mr. Compson's speech as if it were a room. There is a shift in emphasis, for now Quentin is "not listening" to his father, "not because he had heard it all before," as was the case in the earlier chapters, but "because he had something which he was still unable to pass" (218-9): the aftermath of the shooting:

> that door, that gaunt tragic dramatic self-hypnotised 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[.] (219)

Quentin is imposing his own interpretation upon an incident only glancingly recounted by Rosa, viewing it through the lens of a performance of Hamlet, as he had earlier used Hamlet's words to interpret Rosa's description of Ellen. Quentin is using Shakespeare's story (itself a rewriting of other stories) to explicate his re-envisioning of another tale -- a tale that is no longer past since he is retelling it in an attempt to interpret his own life-story. Although Quentin is imagining himself as Henry, he is aware that the past's "curtain" has dropped, that the "rest of the cast ha[s] departed,"

leaving the "stage" "dusty." It is the "last commencement" because that September day was in many ways his graduation from Mississippi since he left soon afterwards for college. Furthermore, by re-imagining that day in Mississippi at Harvard, he becomes aware that the other people, both the narrators and the characters they talked about, have no existence except in his re-telling of the events, an awareness heightened by the knowledge that Rosa is now dead. Moreover, when Quentin left his home to journey to Sutpen's house the story recommenced with him as a participant. Therefore, his journey in 1909 was the last time the story began again; looking back to it in 1910 it was the "last commencement." It was not the final beginning, however, for the story starts once again as Quentin re-envisions his journey and recreates the story, confounding Henry and Judith with himself and Caddy. Revealingly, the immediacy of his imaginative re-creation increases when the description moves to the confrontation with the sister. The language ceases to be adjectivally heavy, with the consequence that the rhythm quickens and the image becomes sharper. The emphasis is on the wedding-dress not being used in 1865, as Quentin hopes it will not be worn in the spring of 1910 when Caddy intends to be married. The implication is that Quentin is now using the scene to project onto the future a narrative: he is imagining the future, telling it through a recollection of the past, hoping to be able to follow its pattern. The scene then merges into his journey with Rosa. As they move towards the house Quentin becomes fearful, wishing to turn back he thinks: "*Good Lord yes, let's don't find him or it, try to find him or it, risk disturbing him or it*" (221). Again the climax is prevented as Quentin, not wishing to remember his journey, is drawn

out of his reverie by Shreve demanding information.

Shreve then begins to add his own sardonic version of the tale and as Quentin listens to his friend he realizes that he is once again engaged in a repetition of his Southern teller/tellee relationship. He feels himself merging into the Mississippi past of his father's voice, now appropriated by Shreve, the new narrator:

> "Yes," Quentin said. *He sounds just like Father* he thought . . . smelling (Quentin) the cigar and wistaria, seeing the fireflies blowing and winking in the September dusk. *Just exactly like father if Father had known as much about it the night before I went out there as he did the day after I came back* thinking *Mad impotent old man who realized at last that there must be some limit to the capabilities of a demon for doing harm*[.] (227)

Although the narrative voice is Shreve's (made clear by Quentin's answering "Yes" on page 232 to a direct question of Shreve's), he reconciles within his narration all of the narrators so far: there is the residual wake of Rosa in the use of the "demon"; there is his own interpretation of Rosa's tale, "Mad impotent old man"; and there is the major presence of Quentin's father. Quentin feels that the boundaries between the narrators and between himself and them are dissolving as he begins to realize that he is trapped within a never-ending process of narrative production.

Having presumably been told by Quentin, who was told by his father, Shreve retells the story of Sutpen's end, which, for Mr. Compson, is the deeply significant, ironic ending to the story. As the story of Sutpen's death leads to an imagining of Sutpen and Wash meeting in heaven and watching Clytie buy a tombstone for Sutpen, the narration moves to Quentin's visit with his father to the Sutpen graves. Shreve forces him once again to re-narrate his own past life within the

parameters of the Sutpen story:

> "How was it?" Shreve said. "You told me; how was it? You and your father shooting quail, the gray day after it had rained all night and the ditch and the horses couldn't cross so you and your father got down and gave the rains to . . . Luster to lead them round the ditch" and he and his father crossed just as the rain began to come down again gray and solid and slow, making no sound, Quentin not yet aware yet of just where they were[.] (234)

As Shreve continues, Quentin not only seems to be inhabiting the narrative voice but also re-living the events of his past. These events, furthermore, are seemingly reflected through the prism of later ones. Events in Quentin's own life seem only to have a relevance now within this greater framework of the Sutpen saga, which, in turn, only has a relevance within a greater framework of previously told tales. Mr. Compson is asking him questions about the Sutpens, which reaffirms the fact that the tale was a constant part of Quentin's past. Furthermore, the way in which the questions are phrased, the information they seek to elicit, implies that they are being posed, narrated, through the lens of what is known since. This implication that the past is always interpreted through what happens afterwards is made explicit a few pages later when Quentin, hearing his visit to the graves being told once again, is able to foretell his father's questions and to answer them from the knowledge that he has gained later: "thinking *Father wont have to say 'think' this time* because he knew who had ordered and bought that headstone . . ." (263). Quentin's own thoughts, however, remain on the Charles-Henry-Judith story and his own relationship with Caddy, for when his father describes the mourning octoroon mistress, married and grieving, he interpolates an idea that insinuates a justification for the shooting of Charles and by analogy the shooting of his own sister's

lover(s): "and last of all, the other woman, Judith *(who, not bereaved, did not need to mourn* Quentin thought, thinking *Yes, I have had to listen too long)*" (257). He realizes that the notion that Judith did not mourn because she was not married is a dangerous train of thought, since it justifies murder, and that it has been suggested to him by the tales he has listened to for "too long."

Quentin's awareness that he has heard too much deepens and he realizes the dangers that the constant retelling has for him: "*Yes. I have heard too much, I have been told too much; I have had to listen to too much, too long*" (259). The never-ending narrations are making him conscious of the fact that if his actions repeat earlier actions, if each climax immediately becomes an anti-climax, than any action he makes begins and finishes nothing. As the deaths of the various Sutpens, their graves, his visit to their graves, his visit to the house when young, all become reconciled in his mind he repeats his words: "*Yes* he thought *Too much, too long* remembering how he had looked at the fifth grave" (263). The story continues into the second and third generation and it is once again emphasized that it is part of Quentin's heritage, part of his life:

> *But you were not listening, because you knew it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will and do: so that what your father was saying did not tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant strings of remembering*[.] (266)

Shreve puts this idea forward, not the impersonal narrator. He could only have acquired this idea from Quentin and Quentin agrees with him. Strikingly, his heritage no longer contains the external reality of Jefferson; it is now something solely made up of language.[26] Indeed, it

is as if he contains and participated in the stories, even before he was told them by his father. Once again the narration moves towards the climax of his visit to the house in 1909, only to be delayed for another time as Shreve prevents Quentin from bringing it to, what for Shreve would be a premature climax: "'Wait then,' Shreve said. 'For God's sake wait'" (270).

Like Chapter Six, Chapter Seven begins in the 1910 Harvard room. Quentin repeats Sutpen's recounting of his early life to his grandfather. He is "dreamy" (272), and not engaged. It is as if he is simply reciting something he has learned by rote; as the conveyor of his society's history, he does not seek to re-interpret it. As his earlier and later despairing comments about never hearing anything but the story make clear, Quentin wants to escape from the story-telling process, from being inscribed in language. He seems to be able to flee as long as he is able to recount a tale that does not directly concern the Charles-Henry-Judith triangle. In the early part of Chapter Seven there seems a secure narrative relationship between him as teller and Shreve as tellee. But during the course of this chapter Shreve is shown to have become linked to the cycle through a repetition of the process that Quentin, by being brought up in the South, has already undergone. Shreve is drawn into the repetitious world of story-telling that Quentin inhabits. The two begin to be confounded as Shreve becomes entwined geographically by the Mississippi river:

> the two of them not moving except to breathe, both young, both born within the same year: the one in Alberta, the other in Mississippi; born half a continent apart yet joined, connected after a fashion in a sort of geographical transubstantiation by that Continental Trough, that River which runs not only through the physical land of which it is the geologic umbilical, not only runs through the spiritual

> lives of the beings within its scope, but is very Environment itself which laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature, though some of these beings, like Shreve, have never seen it[.] (322)

The emphasis is again on the interconnection of all people, caused by the great river which is not only an integral part of their heritage, but is also the source of the very environment in which they live. (According to the Encyclopedia Americana, the doctrine of transubstantiation is "an explanation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist." The article explains that although the accidents, the appearances, remain the same, the two elements which, according to Aristotlean Scholastic theory, make up a substance -- matter and form -- are miraculously transformed.[27]) The suggestion here is that when Quentin and Shreve create the narrative they are transformed into the characters they are portraying. The passage continues by emphasizing their conjunction (the "geological umbilical"), and by portraying Mr. Compson's letter (the linguistic umbilical) as inducing all these narratives:

> the two of them who four months ago had never laid eyes on one another yet who since had slept in the same room and eaten side by side of the same food and used the same books from which to prepare to recite in the same freshman courses, facing one another across the lamplit table on which lay the fragile pandora's box of scrawled paper which had filled with violent and unratiocinative djinns and demons this snug monastic coign, this dreamy heatless alcove of what we call the best of thought. (322-3)

Again events are refracted through previous myths and stories, as well as understood through subsequent narratives, such as Mr. Compson's letter telling of Rosa's death. In addition "coign" is double edged, suggesting the inextricable relationship between action and observation, teller and tellee, and it is also a phrase which was originally used by

one author but whose currency, especially in the South, came from another's reference to it. [**Coign.** 1. In the Shakespearian phrase *coign of vantage*: a position (properly a projecting corner) affording facility for observation or action. (The currency of the phrase is app. due to Sir Walter Scott.).][28]

Shreve now accuses Quentin of sounding like Mr. Compson, causing Quentin to meditate on the conjunction of humanity, past, present, and future, in which each action leads to another and to another in a ceaseless flow. His meditation is heavily reminiscent of Judith's earlier one, but, leading on from the idea of the great river, its central image is of water rather than weaving. The notions both of a separate, autonomous self and of unique, individual actions are once again dismissed since each person is linked to every other person like successive pools, connected by "umbilical water-cord[s]":

> *Yes. Maybe we are both Father. 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 to 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*[.] (326)

Quentin perceives the world here as an endless repetitive process of story-telling since, no matter what someone's immediate environment, he or she "reflect[s] in a different tone" the same patterns. Events, "the pebble," are seen to be repeated in time with a consequent draining of meaning from later actions. Even though people live in a different time, "a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered," their lives move to the same "rhythm" and retell earlier actions: "*that*

pebbles watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to that old ineradicable rhythm" (326). They are all formed by the retelling of stories which echo certain mythic, already told, story-patterns. Quentin's life, for example, centers on Caddy, but his reactions to her behavior, no matter what they may be, will simply be a pale reflections of, even imitations of, narratives he has heard and told, and, moreover, can only be understood through these narratives. All actions, all stories are simply retellings of past stories. If this is so, however, then the process of creation is a mutual one, the past both makes and is made by the present, and both, in turn, are changed by the future. Similarly, a narrator creates and is created by past events. Quentin continues "thinking": "*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*" (326-7). This emphasis on the narrator as "maker," echoing the mythic notion of the poet as maker, suggests the fictive nature of personality, the collaborative nature of fiction-making, and the inability of any event to end the process, to be the climax.

Jean-Paul Sartre argued that Faulkner portrays an existentialist world of entrapment and unintelligibility.[29] For Quentin, his own world is, in one sense, all-too intelligible in that it simply repeats patterns of previous stories, but this awareness leads to an even greater sense of his own meaninglessness. Unlike Sartre's, this recognition does not lead to an escape from the nausea of existence into a dreadful freedom, for there is no hope of the releasing *acte*

gratuit.[30] The world is repetitively deterministic, determinedly repetitive. The universe portrayed in Absalom, Absalom! is made up of stories which echo and are made, narrated so as to echo previous stories and myths. Each event can only be interpreted through other stories, hence the constant allusion to other tales: the story of Absalom, Cain and Abel, the Fall from Eden, the coming of the anti-Christ, the Greek tragedies and myths (especially Oedipus and the House of Atreus), the Waste Land myth, the Faustus story, Hamlet, and so on.[31] The whole novel is also in many ways a synecdoche for the Yoknapatawpha cycle since it seems to contain a myriad of short stories, possible short stories, and story suggestions: Rosa's courtship, her Aunt's elopement, Mr. Coldfield's actions during the Civil War, Ellen's marriage, the race to church, the "fall" from west Virginia, the hunting of the French architect, the lives of Charles's descendants, and so on. The novel itself had its genesis in a variety of short stories, the most important of which is "Wash," which Faulkner rewrites and alters in Absalom, Absalom!.[32] There seem to be echoes of previous tales of Faulkner's: Rosa's life seems to echo Emily's in "A Rose For Emily," Etienne Bon's life parallels Joe Christmas's in Light In August, Wash Jones's daughter's fate perhaps mirrors Temple Drake's in Sanctuary, and, finally, there is the overwhelming presence of The Sound And The Fury. All these echoes of, and suggestions for, other narratives help give the novel its intertextual resonance as each successive narrative offers paths and routes that are not taken or have already been taken. Quentin becomes more and more drawn into this intertextual web and comes to view his own life as simply a synecdoche for this greater whole.

Quentin is forced into the narrative forefront as Shreve starts to question his version of the tale. Quentin has difficulty speaking, however, which suggests that the event is too traumatic for him to verbalize:

> "Your father," Shreve said. "He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick, after having waited forty-five years. If he knew all this, what was his reason for telling you that the trouble between Henry and Bon was the octoroon woman?"
>
> "He didn't know it then. Grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it."
>
> "Then who did tell him?"
>
> "I did," Quentin did not move, did not look up while Shreve watched him. "The day after we -- after that night when we -- "
>
> "Oh," Shreve said. "After you and the old aunt . . ." (332)

As Quentin moves to the center of the story he acknowledges that his role is crucial both for the story's interpretation, and for its very details:

> "And when your old man told it to you, you wouldn't have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn't been out there and seen Clytie. Is that right?"
>
> "Yes," Quentin said. (342)

As soon as Quentin admits this, there is a description of their tomb-like room:

> It was cold in the room now. The heat was almost gone out of the radiators: the cold iron fluting stern signal and admonition for sleeping, the little death, the renewal. It had been some time since the chimes had rung eleven. (342-3)

"Little death" is a translation of 'petit-mort,' French slang for orgasm, suggesting the dark effect that the climax of the story will have on Quentin. Quentin is offered no answer, no closure, because the story's climax for him is simply an awareness that there can be no

narrative climax, that no action finishes anything, that even dramatic, death-dealing events (such as the shooting of Charles) are anti-climactic, become renewals, occasions for further narratives.

When Shreve's narration nears the shooting, it is Quentin who shouts "wait" (345), preventing his roommate from reaching it; Quentin presumably wants to avoid confronting again the traumatic scenes of Charles's shooting and Henry's subsequent confrontation with Judith. This assertion of control over the narrative is, nevertheless, immediately disowned for Quentin is aware that the story cannot be ruled by any one person: it is in the public domain. The image is of a never-ending circularity, like a mobius strip:

> *Am I going to have to hear it all over again* he thought *I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do*[.] (345-6)

Quentin realizes that by telling Shreve the tale he has ensured that his friend became linked to the same fluid umbilical cord of language. Despite this connection, they are still distinct from one another since they are portrayed as fighting over the tale. They both attempt to become the narrator and to impose the role of the narratee upon the other. Shreve attempts to wrest back control, saying, "No . . . you wait. Let me play a while now," but is interrupted by Quentin: "He did not even falter, taking Shreve up in mid-stride without comma or colon or paragraph" (225). The "mid-stride," however, is after Charles's death and Henry's subsequent confrontation with Judith, as Quentin hurries on, trying to bring the tale to a climax with Wash's death:

> Only [Wash] was running toward them all, de Spain said,

> running into the lanterns so that now they could see the scythe raised above his head; they could see his face, his eyes too, as he ran with the scythe above his head, straight into the lanterns and the gun barrels, making no sound, no outcry while de Spain ran backward before him , saying, 'Jones! Stop! Stop, or I'll kill you. Jones! Jones! JONES!' (364)

This climax is again superseded as Shreve forces Quentin to go back into his narrative by asking him to clarify the motive for Sutpen's actions. Quentin's attempt to close the story fails then, and in Chapter Eight he is forced to hear and retell the Charles-Henry-Judith story anew. For Shreve, this new version closes off the tale, making it bounded and safe. For Quentin, however, the climax is again displaced, suggesting that for him the importance of the tale lies elsewhere. Recreating his visit to the house with Rosa, he is confronted both with the knowledge that the story-paradigm he is offered provides no solution to his own problems and with the awareness that if stories endlessly repeat themselves then his future has already been written.

IV

With the constant refrain of "not two of them . . . but four of them" (367), Chapter Eight portrays Shreve and Quentin as disappearing within the narrative, becoming as much a part of the narration as any of the other characters:

> [Quentin and Shreve] could without moving, as free now of flesh as the father who decreed and forbade, the son who denied and repudiated, the lover who acquiesced, the beloved who was not bereaved, . . . be already clattering over the frozen ruts[.] (368-9)

There is a reaffirmation of the fact that people re-enact archetypal story-patterns for "what names and what faces they called themselves and were called by [did not matter] so long as the blood coursed --" (369).

As with transubstantiation the accidents -- the story-patterns -- remain, but the substance -- the body -- changes, becomes the narrators': "[T]he two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere" (378-9). The narrators create the characters, become them, and like them only have an existence within the narrative voice as the roles of narrator, narratee, and actor(s) become reconciled:

> [I]t did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone that did it . . . but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing, wherein each before the demand, the requirement forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other -- faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived[.] (395)

Everyone is portrayed here as inhabiting the realm of language and, accordingly, the time spheres are confounded into the present moment of narrative production. Furthermore, since the story they are producing is set in 1860 New Orleans the 1910 Harvard room in which they are creating the tale becomes unreal: "Four of them there, in that room in New Orleans in 1860, just as in a sense there were four of them here in this tomblike room in Massachusetts in 1910" (419).

The story they tell is a romantic thriller, a tale more coherent than those narrated earlier because it creates links, causal relationships, between incidents which were previously separate and unconnected. Sutpen's early life in Haiti is linked to his later life by the introduction of an avenging wife and his abandoned son. As a consequence, Charles ceases to be the listless, apathetic,

undecipherable figure of Mr. Compson's tale; instead he becomes a romantically tragic hero who is active, searching for recognition from his father. The introduction of the shyster lawyer is similarly a narrative device that emphasizes Charles's romantic heroism and allows the narrators to produce the duel for honor demanded by the genre within which they are working. Mr. Compson's theory that Henry shot Charles because of Charles's previous marriage (an explanation which even Mr. Compson's recognizes is inadequate) is repudiated:

> And Bon may have, probably did, take Henry to call on the octoroon mistress and the child, as Mr Compson said, though neither Shreve nor Quentin believed that the visit affected Henry as Mr Compson seemed to think. In fact, Quentin did not even tell Shreve what his father had said about the visit. (419)

They surmise that in the first confrontation between father and son, Sutpen told Henry that Charles was his half-brother. Since it was only after the second confrontation four years later that Henry shot Charles they assume that in 1865 he was told something else. Therefore, the fact that Charles was his brother cannot, within their narrative frame, be the reason why Henry shot him. The incest becomes condoned, even encouraged, by Henry -- he is conceived of as citing incestuous unions -- "But kings have done it! Even dukes! There was that Lorraine duke named John something that married his sister. The Pope excommunicated him but it didnt hurt!" (427). To provide another reason for the shooting, to produce the climax to the story, Shreve uses Quentin's journey to the mansion with Rosa: "[a]nd so you and the old dame, the Aunt Rosa, went out there that night . . . and [Clytie] 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

--" (437). Shreve makes the threat of miscegenation, not the incest, become the trigger for the shooting: Charles informs Henry that "*I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry*" (446). This narrative shift allows Shreve's to "naturalize" the Sutpen story, making it conform thematically to his notions about the South's racist attitudes, and to historicize it, providing him with the means to "place it" as well as to distance himself from it geographically and historically: "The South. Jesus" (469). Satisfied with this climax, he comfortably "go[es] to bed" (448).

For Quentin, however, this version of the story -- this climax, this resolution of the "whydunit" -- does not provide such a comfort. In Chapter Nine he recalls, he is forced once more to return to, his journey to the house in 1909. At long last the ending to the Mississippi evening, delayed since Chapter Five, occurs. The climactic meeting, however, provides Quentin with a paradigm for his own life-story that he would rather not confront. Accordingly, Henry's revelation is not revealed, recalled; instead the emphasis falls -- as it has throughout the novel -- on repetition:

> *And you are --?*
> *Henry Sutpen.*
> *And you have been here --?*
> *Four years.*
> *And you came home --?*
> *To die. Yes.*
> *To die?*
> *Yes. To die.*
> *And you have been here --?*
> *Four years.*
> *And you are --?*
> *Henry Sutpen.* (464-5)

It is almost as if the two Quentins of the first chapter are once again engaged in a endlessly circling and repetitive dialogue; but now he is

without the safety of a third Quentin watching his ghostly selves. Henry, like Rosa in Chapter One, is one of the ghosts who will not die, whom Quentin is condemned to hear. Face to face with one of the protagonists of his narration -- a Sutpen is talking to him as opposed to being reported speaking -- Quentin is left with a ghost who has come to life only to die. There is an echo of the Waste Land myth so prominent in The Sound and the Fury: Quentin asks the right questions of the fisher-king, but the answers do not lead to a miraculous recovery. Instead, Quentin becomes the waste land, the "body-politic" of a "commonwealth" of "garrulous" ghosts (5). And perhaps there is an ironic half-echo of the Oedipus myth: Quentin solves the riddle, but this does not allow him to commit incest. The answer that he represses in Chapter Nine, that Charles was Henry's brother, explains why Shreve's "cultural" explanation -- miscegenation -- does not close the story for Quentin. Knowing nothing of Quentin's complex relationship with Caddy, Shreve cannot fathom the depths of Quentin's personal anguish. With Henry's answer the sister's suitor (Charles Bon, Dalton Ames) is transformed from the would-be seducer-defiler into the identified-with brother. The incestuous implications of the Charles-Henry-Judith triangle are no longer vicarious or displaced but actual. Furthermore, if events repeat themselves, then the future that is foretold by Henry's story is Quentin's own death since he will slay the would-be incestuous brother -- himself.

In effect, then, Henry's shooting of Charles, though initially seen as a solution to Quentin's problems with Caddy, solved nothing for Quentin, was not the telos, an act which dispensed meaning to lives, a

mythic point, in relation to which all events can be measured and assessed by. It did not end Henry's story, which only concludes when Quentin imagines Rosa's final journey to Sutpen's mansion: "And he, Quentin, could see that too, though he had not been there" (466). But the burning of the house, with the subsequent deaths of Rosa, Clytie, and Henry, is not the promised end, but simply an image of the apocalypse, and of Quentin's own end. The fall of the House of Sutpen echoes the fall of the House of Coldfield, echoes the fall of the House of Usher, echoes the fall of the House of Atreus, echoes the fall of the House of Oedipus, echoes the fall of the House of Compson -- "reducto absurdum" as Quentin recalls in The Sound and the Fury.[33]

Absalom, Absalom! ends with Shreve taunting Quentin by being deliberately, provocatively racist, trying to get Quentin to accept his interpretation of the Sutpen story, the pattern he has woven. Quentin, however, has woven his own pattern: the incest motive (bearing all-too-directly on him) is what prompted the shooting and confronts him with the necessity of his own self-slaying. Left with only a repetitive affirmation of denial, he is also confronted with Judith's despairing knowledge that whatever action he makes does not seem to matter, because in the eternal flowing proces of narrative production that constitutes his world it will simply be yet another repetition:

> "I dont hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I dont hate it," he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!* (471)

Tragically, although people cannot help but imitate pre-determined story-patterns, their emotions remain their own. Quentin will never be able to solve or end his problems -- except, like Henry, in death.

After he remembers his confrontation with Henry he is shown to be near death in his "tomblike" Harvard room:

> He lay still and rigid on his back with the cold New England night on his face and the blood running warm in his rigid body and limbs, breathing hard but slow, his face wide open upon the window, thinking 'Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore. Nevermore. Nevermore. Nevermore. (465)

Quentin realizes that he has followed the same journey as the character in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," which also takes place in a student's room at midnight in the depths of winter.[34] The poem's protagonist is mourning his lost love, as Quentin mourns his, and both attempt to find "surcease of sorrow" from tales, from "books" (10). Both are caught in a world of repetition and their investigation of this world has traumatic results. The raven appears, an image of an earlier, nobler time, and it seems to offer some answer to the student's problems just as the past, heroic ante-bellum lives of the Sutpens seem to for Quentin. The protagonist of the poem seeks to create an ironic distance between himself and the bird, as Quentin initially tried to do, but gradually gets drawn into "linking / Fancy unto fancy" (69-70), into creating narratives because of (as Poe explains it) "the human thirst for self-torture."[35] Like Quentin, he tortures himself with the awareness that he will never find consolation: there will "be balm in Gilead . . . [n]evermore" (89-90); that he has lost his love for ever: he "shall clasp . . . Lenore . . . [n]evermore" (93-95); and that he will never be able to escape from the knowledge he has gained through the creation of narratives: the raven will "take [its] form from off [his] door . . . [n]evermore" (101-2). Consequently, both are doomed: the poem's protagonist's "soul from out that shadow . . . [s]hall be

lifted -- nevermore" (105-6), and neither will Quentin's: the rest of his life has already been foretold. Confronted with the knowledge that the only escape from the repetitively deterministic world of narrative-production he inhabits is death, he is tragically aware that his own death, by following a pattern already written, will simply reaffirm the nature of that world.

Notes

[1] The Oxford English Dictionary: The Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 13: 612.

[2] Oxford 3: 717-8.

[3] Oxford 13: 310.

[4] Both Walter Brylowski, "Faulkner's 'Mythology'," William Faulkner's "Absalom, Absalom!: A Critical Casebook, ed. Elisabeth Muhlenfeld (New York: Garland, 1984) 109-30, and Richard Adams, Faulkner: Myth and Motion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) 172-214, discuss the nature of myth and its relevance to Absalom, Absalom!. My distinction between the mythic and the heroic is based upon Frank Kermode's distinction between myth and fiction in The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) 39. In Kermode's terms, both Rosa and Quentin can be seen as attempting to create a myth out of the Sutpen saga in order to validate their own existence, whereas Mr. Compson and Shreve are satisfied with creating just another fiction.

[5] Oxford 13: 352-3.

[6] For extended discussions of the curse of slavery and its relationship to original sin see, Robert Barth, "Faulkner and the Calvinist Tradition," Religious Perspectives in Faulkner's Fiction: Yoknapatawpha and Beyond, ed. Robert Barth (Notre Dame: University of

Notre Dame Press, 1972) 11-31; John V. Hagopian, "Absalom, Absalom! and the Negro Question," Modern Fiction Studies 19 (1973): 207-211; and Lyall H. Powers, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Comedy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980) 106-24.

[7] In The Critical Act: Criticism and Community (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), Evan Watkins has an interesting discussion of the effect of Sutpen's death on Rosa and her need to retell the story in order to "eke out an existence" (193).

[8] Laura E. Donaldson, in "The Perpetual Conversation: The Process of Traditioning in Absalom, Absalom!," Modernist Studies: Literature and Culture 4 (1982): 176-94, discusses the transmission of tradition from generation to generation through the telling of stories.

[9] "Like Niobe, all tears[.]" (1.2.149.) William Shakespeare, Hamlet, ed. T. J. B. Spencer (London: Penguin, 1980) 75.

[10] See my discussion on page 30.

[11] For this paragraph I am indebted to the discussion of tableaux in Absalom, Absalom! by Gary Lee Stonum, Faulkner's Career: An internal Literary History (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979) 123-52.

[12] My discussion of the endings in Absalom, Absalom! is indebted to Leonard Davis Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction (New York: Methuen, 1987) 191-223, and to Kermode.

[13] For example, Melvin E. Bradford, "Brother, Son, and Heir: The Structural Focus of Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!," Sewanee Review 78 (1970): 76-98; John T. Irwin, Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); Donald M. Kartigner, "Quentin Compson and

Faulkner's Drama of the Generations," Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Compson Family, ed. Arthur Kinney (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982): 381-401; Estalla Schoenberg, Old Tales and Talking: Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's "Absalom, Absalom!" and Related Works (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1977); Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964) 84-102; Thomas Daniel Young, "Narration as Creative Act: The Role of Quentin Compson in Absalom, Absalom!," in Kinney, 318-31.

[14] For an examination of the novel's detective story form in relation to the historian's role see, Hugh C. Holman, "Absalom, Absalom!: The Historian as Detective," Sewanee Review 79 (1971): 542-553; for a discussion of Quentin as detective see, May Cameron Brown and Esta Seaton, "William Faulkner's Unlikely Detective: Quentin Compson in Absalom, Absalom!," Essays in Arts and Sciences 8 (1979): 277-298; for a discussion as to why Faulkner's preoccupation with perception lead to the utilization of the detective form see, Arthur F. Kinney, "Faulkner's Fourteenth Image," Paintbrush 2 (1974): 36-43; for a discussion of the reader as detective see, Mark Gidley, "Elements of the Detective Story in William Faulkner's Fiction," Journal of Popular Culture 7 (1973): 97-123.

[15] Christine de Montauzon in Faulkner's "Absalom, Absalom! and Interpretability: The Inexplicable Unseen (Berne: Peter Lang, 1985) summarizes and works through virtually every critical approach exercised on Absalom, Absalom! to show how the novel resists one unifying interpretation. The difficulties of knowing even the basic facts of the

Sutpen saga are examined by Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, "'We Have Waited Long Enough': Judith Sutpen and Charles Bon," in Muhlenfeld, 174-88; Floyd C. Watkins, "What Happens in Absalom, Absalom!" in Muhlenfeld, 55-64; and David Levin, In Defense of Historical Literature: Essays on American History, Autobiography, Drama, and Fiction (New York 1967) 118-39. The difficulties are exemplified by the endless debate about what Quentin actually saw or was told at Sutpen's Hundred, see especially, Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatwpha Country (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963) 424-43 and William Faulkner: Yoknapatawpha and Beyond (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978) 301-28; John Hagan, "Fact and Fancy in Absalom, Absalom!" College English 24 (1962): 215-18; John V. Hagopian, "Black Insight in Absalom, Absalom!," Faulkner Studies 1 (1980): 29-36; and Hershel Parker, "What Quentin Saw 'Out There'," Mississippi Quarterly 27 (1974): 323-26.

[16] Both Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1966), and Hugh Ruppersburg, Voice and Eye in Faulkner's Fiction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983) assert that the novel is concerned primarily with Quentin and not the Sutpens.

[17] For differing versions of the type of story-forms imposed upon the events by the various narrators see, Adams; Philip J. Egan, "Embedded Story Structures in Absalom, Absalom!," American Literature 55 (May 1983): 199-214; James Guetti, "Absalom, Absalom!: The Extended Simile," in Muhlenfeld, 65-92; Suzanne W. Jones, "Absalom, Absalom! and the Southern Custom of Storytelling: A reflection of Southern Social and Literary History," Southern Studies 24 (1985): 82-112; and Lynn G. Levins, "The Four Narrative Perspectives in Absalom, Absalom!," PMLA

85.1 (1970): 35-47.

[18] "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; / They kill us for their sport." (4.1.36-7.) Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. G. K. Hunter (London: Penguin, 1972) 139.

[19] See, for example, Guetti, Levins, and Ruppersburg.

[20] See, for example, David Paul Ragan, William Faulkner's "Absalom, Absalom!": A Critical Study (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), esp. 43-7.

[21] In William Faulkner: From Jefferson to the World (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), Hyatt Waggoner similarly points out that the past is "continually reinterpreted" (155) by the present, but does not suggest that the past dictates the way in which the present is able to read it.

[22] For my discussion of Bon's letter I am indebted to James G. Watson, William Faulkner, Letters and Fictions (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

[23] Barry C. Chabot argues that one of Faulkner's major themes is such denials of the past and their consequences, "Faulkner's Rescued Patrimony," Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry 13 (1974): 274-86.

[24] In "Reading Bon's Letter and Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!," PMLA 99.2 (1984): 225-41, David Krause examines the various interpretations of this letter, concentrating particularly on Charles and Henry.

[25] Both John T. Matthews, in "The Marriage of Speaking and Hearing in Absalom, Absalom!," ELH 47 (1980): 575-94, and Irwin

emphasize the similarities between Rosa and Quentin.

[26] Thadious M. Davis argues that all the narrators project their own personalities onto the world and that, as a consequence, every external description in the novel is in fact an interior landscape, "'Be Sutpen's Hundred': Imaginative Projection of Landscape in Absalom, Absalom!," Southern Literary Journal 13 (1981): 3-14.

[27] James F. Driscoll and Thomas U. Mullany, "Transubstantaition," Encyclopaedia Americana, (1986 ed): 27-8.

[28] Oxford, 3: 452.

[29] "American Novelists in French Eyes," The Atlantic Monthly 178, (1946): 114-8; "Time In Faulkner: The Sound And The Fury," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1973) 180-8; and "Sartoris by William Faulkner," Literary and Philosophical Essays (London: Rider, 1955) 73-8. For a discussion of Thomas Sutpen as an exemplary Sartrean hero see, William J. Sowder, "Colonel Thomas Sutpen as Existentialist Hero," American Literature 33 (1962): 485-99.

[30] The clearest example of the nausea of existence and the possibility of escape is in Sartre's La Nausee/Nausea, translated by Lloyd Alexander (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1964). Albert Camus's L'Etranger/The Stranger, translated by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), contains perhaps the most famous portrayal of the releasing acte gratuit. In a letter published in The Harvard Advocate 135.2 (1951), Camus calls Faulkner America's "plus grand ecrivain" (21).

[31] For discussions of the various allusions in Absalom, Absalom! see, Lennart Bjork, "Ancient Myths and the Moral Framework of Faulkner's

Absalom, Absalom!," American Literature 35 (1963): 196-204, and Brylowski. For examinations of the biblical allusions see, Maxine Rose, "From Genesis to Revelation: The Grand Design of William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!," Studies in American Fiction 2 (1980): 219-28; Stephen M. Ross, "Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and the David Story: A Speculative Contemplation," The David Myth In Western Literature, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Jan Wojcik (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1980) 136-53. For discussions of the classical background see, Levins, and Ilsa D, Lind, "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!," Hoffman and Vickery, 278-304. For an examination of the Waste Land theme see, Robert M. Slabey, "Faulkner's 'Waste Land': Vision in Absalom, Absalom!," Mississippi Quarterly 14 (1961): 153-61. Elizabeth M. Kerr examines the Faust story in relation to the novel in "Absalom, Absalom!: Faust in Mississippi, or, The Fall of the House of Sutpen," University of Mississippi Studies in English 15 (1978): 61-82.

[32] For detailed discussion of the composition of Absalom, Absalom! with particular reference to the various short stories which were written immediately before it, see, Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, "Introduction," in Muhlenfeld, xi-xxix; and Ragan, 1-18. For a discussion which concentrates on "Evangeline" and its relationship to the novel see, Brenda G. Cornell, "Faulkner's 'Evangeline': A Preliminary Stage," The Southern Quarterly 22 (1984): 22-41; For a discussion of "Evangeline" and the other Don-and-I stories see, Schoenberg.

[33] The Corrected Text, ed. Noel Polk (New York, Vintage Books, 1987) 86.

[33] The Corrected Text, ed. Noel Polk (New York, Vintage Books, 1987) 86.

[34] "The Philsophy of Composition," Selected Prose and Poetry (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1950) 426.

[35] The Poems Of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Floyd Stovall (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965) 95-9.

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