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The Narrative Poetics of William Faulkner:
An Analysis of Form and Meaning

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Abstract

Most critical acclaim of William Faulkner has focused on his innovations of narrative technique, and while critics have frequently noted the correlation between form and meaning in his novels, the central focus of these novels - race - has largely been ignored in the criticism. The purpose of this paper is to examine Faulkner's narrative methodology and arrangement of material in order to demonstrate that the structures of his novels, particularly Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!, consistently enhance and dramatize the major subject and themes of the novels. Under careful scrutiny, these structures reveal an effective and dramatic parallel between Faulkner's rhetorical methodology and the complexity of his subject matter - the South, and the issue of race.

Résumé

La critique a fait les éloges de l'innovation de la technique narrative dans les romans de William Faulkner. Alors que cette critique soulève fréquemment la rélation entre la forme et le sens dans les romans de Faulkner, le thème central, soit l'esclavage, a été largement passé sous silence par celle-ci. La présente étude analyse la méthodologie de William Faulkner dans ses principales romans, «Light in August» et «Absalom, Absalom!», afin de démontrer que la trame narrative employée fait ressortir et dramatise les sujets et les thèmes principaux de ses romans. Sous étude minutieuse, cette trame revèle un parallèle dramatique entre la rhétorique de Faulkner et la compléxité du sujet traité, à savoir le stigmate de l'esclavage dans les États du Sud.

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Introduction

It is the thesis of this paper that Faulkner's narrative methodology was essential to the dramatization of the major subjects and themes of his novels, and that the form of his most successful novels enhances, and is to a large extent determined by, these issues. I will argue that there is a parallel between Faulkner's narrative methodology and the complexity of his subject matter - the South. I will thus argue that in his most successful novels, Faulkner managed to structurally integrate the elements of narrative with provocative themes and issues, and to develop a striking and accomplished narrative style.

Both Light in August and Absalom, Absalom! have been praised as Faulkner's most successful work, and I intend to justify this claim by analysing the rhetorical structures of these novels. I intend to provide an analysis of these novels at the level of form in order to demonstrate the way in which the elements of narrative, and their correspondence and interdependence, enhance our interpretation of the novels, and how Faulkner's narrative poetics consistently reflect the major themes of his work. It is my contention that we cannot analyze his accomplishments with respect to literary technique without discussing the issues of race and miscegenation he was addressing. This is the major shortcoming of Faulkner criticism of the last fifty years, and while Faulkner's contemporary Southern critics may be forgiven for not discussing the issue of race at the time, it cannot be ignored today.

I will begin this analysis with an overview of the major criticism which has focused on form and meaning in Faulkner's work, in order to examine the way in which the

structural elements of the novels, such as the narrative stance, characterization, tone, setting, repetition and parallel, and the use of flashback, etc., have been approached as reflections of subject and theme in these novels. Since no discussion of Faulkner's narrative technique would be complete without reference to The Sound and the Fury, I will focus on the integration of form and meaning in that novel as a sample of the type of reading required for Faulkner's more racialized works.

In the second section of this paper, I will discuss the manifestation of theme at the level of structure in the short story "That Evening Sun" (1931). That approach will then be applied to Light in August (1932), and Absalom, Absalom! (1936), which develop Faulkner's major themes and, significantly, his most stylized and rhetorically complex narrative structures. Due to Faulkner's success at storytelling within the constraints of the short story format, I intend to develop my argument with the short story in order to analyze Faulkner's rhetoric in a controlled, traditional narrative.[1]

The short story will also enable me to address the social and moral complexity of the racially-charged South, which Faulkner develops as the central subject in his later novels. We shall see that miscegenation, as manifested in the characters of Joe Christmas and Charles Bon, is the central issue in both Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!. There is

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[1] Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie, eds., Faulkner and the Short Story: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1992); James B. Carothers, "Faulkner's Short Stories: And Now What's to Do", New Directions in Faulkner Studies: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1983, Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, eds. (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1984) 202-227, 203-205; Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner, (New York: Random House, 1963), "Short Stories" at 259-279.

no doubt that Faulkner's approach to the issue of race was a careful and deliberate one, and in these novels, he conveyed how profoundly the issue of race and the legacy of slavery affected the South by its dense implication in his text. Indeed, it is impossible to discuss any Southern writer without revisiting the issue of race, and this is especially true of Faulkner's greatest work.

In his landmark study, Faulkner: The House Divided, Eric Sundquist asserts that Faulkner's writing "at its best perfectly accorded with the single most agonizing experience of his region and his nation: the crisis and long aftermath of American slavery."[2] He claims that by focusing on the issue of miscegenation in Light in August, Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down, Moses, Faulkner discovered "the visionary powers the problem of race was capable of engaging as it became, over the course of his career, the definitive crises of twentieth-century American social history and the violently explicit subject of his fiction" (ix). Sundquist maintains, however, that while "the issues of race and miscegenation are fully involved in the novel's form, there is no reason to suggest that this involvement is an explicitly causal one..." (78) and that "Light in August might well have had a similar form without the ambiguity of Christmas' blood, without his being "Negro" at all" (78-79). On the contrary, I believe that by making Joe Christmas (who may be of mixed race parentage) the central character of Light in August, Faulkner brought the issue of race to the forefront of his fiction, and that from that point on, he would address the issue in a more global context, as he went on to do in Absalom, Absalom!. Furthermore, to the extent that the issues are "fully involved in the novel's form", I would argue that the very substantive

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[2] Eric J. Sundquist, Faulkner: The House Divided (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1983) 6.

portion of the novel devoted to Joe Christmas and his relationships with other characters - relationships that are structured by racial ambivalence and ambiguity, demonstrates how the issues of race and miscegenation inform the structure of the novel.

Indeed, since the story (and past) of Joe Christmas constitutes the bulk of the novel, all present time narration serves as a counterpoint of reference to the central issue of his character - the possibility of miscegenation. The form of this novel is determined by Faulkner's exploration of this issue through the delayed introduction of Joe Christmas and the presentation of his character from afar, through the viewpoint of other characters. This is especially striking in contrast to the detailed description of the inner world of Lena Grove which has preceded, and serves to emphasize the essential isolation of the character of Joe Christmas. Once we grasp the central issue about Joe Christmas - the confusion over his racial heritage - we are able to interpret the narrative with an appreciation of the structural methodology Faulkner devised in order to tell these many stories about the South and its people, with over twenty fully-developed characters, most of whom are affected by complexes of race and/or religion.

Toni Morrison has argued in her work, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, that in considering American literature, it has become necessary to examine "what happens when ... writers work in a highly and historically racialized society."[3] Significantly, she writes in the Preface to Playing in the Dark that she had been

[3] Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination, (New York: Random House, 1992), 4.

interested for a long time "in the way black people ignite critical moments of discovery or emphasis in literature not written by them" (viii). She has described her focus in the following way:

> [My project] rises from what I know about the ways writers transform aspects of their social grounding into aspects of language, and the ways they tell other stories, fight secret wars, limn out all sorts of debates blanketed in their text. And rises from my certainty that writers always know, at some level, that they do this. (4)

In fact, the issue of race is so central to Faulkner's major novels, that it has thematic ramifications on several levels, particularly as a reference to the legacy of slavery in the South, and as an allegory for society's futile insistence on absolutes in terms of good and evil (black and white). Morrison is acutely aware of the inability of critics to address the issue of race, even when, as in Faulkner, it is the obvious focus of the work.[4] Of particular interest is the way in which the issue of miscegenation in American literature has traditionally resulted in the notion of the "taint" of black blood, and the recurring image of the "tragic mulatto" that we find in Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!.[5] Faulkner criticism has

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[4] "These speculations have led me to wonder whether the major and championed characteristics of our national literature - individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell - are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence. It has occurred to me that the very manner by which American literature distinguishes itself as a coherent entity exists because of this unsettled and unsettling population" (Morrison, 5-6).

[5] Erskine Peters, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha World and Black Being, (Darby, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1983), especially "Minds in Collusion: Miscegenation and the Mulatto Crisis", 111-134.

largely ignored the problem that the issue of race creates in analysing the texts, and the glaring lacuna concerning it, is one of the reasons for the present study.

At the turn of the century, W.E.B. DuBois pronounced that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line."[6] For American society, and especially the South of Faulkner's novels, the colour line has been the defining historical, social and political issue, from the introduction of slavery to the present day. Frederick Karl believes that although Faulkner's public statements about race "were contradictory and even inflammatory ... Faulkner's views on race in his fiction were highly sophisticated, not easily summarized or tidied up", and that what is at stake in Faulkner's fiction "is not only the South, not only the Negro, but the country."[7] Indeed, Faulkner's press dispatch on the Emmett Till case reads as a ringing indictment of American society with respect to the issue of race.[8]

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[6] W.E.B. Dubois, Writings, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1986), in his forward to "The Souls of Black Folk": 359-547, on "the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century" (359).

[7] Frederick R. Karl, William Faulkner: American Writer (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992), 448. He goes on to say that although Faulkner's focus was the South, "in his best work, he becomes an American and there race bursts all boundaries and becomes part of American themes" (448).

[8] Emmett Till was a fourteen-year-old African-American from Chicago who was murdered by three white men in Mississippi on or about August 28, 1955. The accused were acquitted by an all-white, male jury on September 23, 1955 in Sumner, Mississippi. Faulkner's dispatch from Rome was written prior to the acquittal, which was a foregone conclusion. He did not refer to the trial, but ended his dispatch by saying that "if we in America have reached that point in our desperate culture when we must murder children, no matter for what reason or what color, we don't deserve to survive, and probably won't." William Faulkner, "Press Dispatch Written in Rome, Italy, for the United States on the Emmett Till Case", Essays, Speeches & Public Letters by William Faulkner, James B. Meriwether, ed., (New York: Random House, 1965) 222-223.

Those texts which have addressed Faulkner's attitudes towards the issue of race serve to remind us that Faulkner was writing and speaking about the problems of his native state and the nation at a time of tremendous racial unrest, with the resultant political and social upheaval.[9] He was in turn despised as a bigot by liberal thinkers, and vilified as a traitor to his own white, southern heritage. While his sympathy and support of African-Americans did not win him favour with southern whites, his arguments against forced integration, and his attempts to mollify the ambitions of African-Americans and their leaders in the early part of the civil rights movement met with disdain. In his "Letter to the North", known as the "Go Slow Now" speech, Faulkner urged caution in a tone and manner which could only rankle those who were battling racial prejudice, social injustice, and political disenfranchisement:

> So I would say to the NAACP and all the organizations who would compel immediate and unconditional integration: 'Go slow now. Stop now for a time, a moment. You have the power now; you can afford to withhold for a moment the use of it as a force. You have done a good job, you have jolted your opponent off-balance and he is now vulnerable. But stop there for a moment ...'[10]

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[9] Notably, Thadious Davis, Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, eds., Faulkner and Race: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1986 (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1987).

[10] William Faulkner, "Letter to a Northern Editor" (originally published as "A Letter to the North", (Life, March 5, 1956)), in Meriwether, Essays, 86-91, 87. In a subsequent letter to the Editor, Faulkner explained that "The reason behind the letter was the attempt of an individual to save the South and the whole United States too from the blot of Miss Autherine Lucy's death. ... I believed that when the judge abrogated [her] suspension, which he would have to do, the forces supporting her attempt to enter the university as a student would send her back to it. I believed that if they did so, she would possibly lose her life." William Faulkner, (Life, March 26, 1956) as reported in Meriwether, Essays, 224.

In response, Faulkner received, among other missives, the following telegraph on April 15, 1956:

> Doctor W.E.B. Dubois - 88 year old negro co-founder of NAACP challenges you to debate on the steps of Court House Sumner, Mississippi where Emmett Till case was tried, on subject of your "Go slow now" advice to Negroes.

to which Faulkner replied by way of an open telegram to the New York Times on April 17, 1956:

> I do not believe there is a debatable point between us. We both agree in advance that the position you will take is right morally legally and ethically. (If it is not evident to you) that the position I take in asking for moderation and patience is right practically then we will both waste our breath in debate.[11]

In a subsequent article, entitled, "If I were a Negro", Faulkner went further, and addressed the same issues as though he were speaking as a member and representative of the NAACP, urging patience with respect to the enforcement of the Supreme Court decision, Brown v. Board of Education, with an unfortunate proviso: "We must learn to deserve equality so that we can hold and keep it after we get it."[12] This sentiment - that African-Americans were not ready for and perhaps did not yet deserve full equality - as well as his

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[11] Charles D. Peavy, Go Slow Now: Faulkner and the Race Question (Eugene, Oregon: U of Oregon, 1971), 78.

[12] William Faulkner, "If I Were a Negro", (Ebony, September, 1956, 70-73), as reported in Peavy, Go Slow Now, 80-81.

inflammatory statements in the now famous London Sunday Times interview[13], did not do justice to his compassion for the plight of African-Americans and his condemnation of white intolerance and racial hatred. Yet, while such statements are dismaying, they point to the real dilemma of white southerners who rejected government (read northern) intervention in what was perceived to be largely a southern problem. Ironically, Faulkner perceived correctly that the racial upheaval of the South would soon become a national crisis, with ramifications in all areas of life throughout the United States, and would eventually affect the country's standing in the global community.

It is in his two greatest novels, Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!, that Faulkner conveyed this profound compassion for his nation's racial dilemma. Miscegenation is the dominant thematic and structural element in these novels, and, to the degree to which the issue of race permeates and informs the narrative by way of contrast, parallel or juxtaposition, we have ample proof that Faulkner's goal was to explore the issue of race in the twentieth-century South of his novels.[14] As depicted in Light in August, the legacy of slavery and racial injustice rises in the midst of tranquil, religious Southern society in the form of miscegenation as a litmus of the moral fortitude of that society. Miscegenation, in the guise of a man or woman who appears outwardly "white" , represents to the South the

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[13] Faulkner allegedly told Russell Warren Howe in an interview that he would be prepared to fight forced integration "even if it meant going out into the street and shooting Negroes". London Sunday Times, March 4, 1956, p. 4, as reported in Peavy, Go Slow Now, 69-70.

[14] Peavy concurs that "miscegenation was an inevitable result of slavery, and it is quite natural that it is a major issue in Faulkner's treatment of slavery in the South" (33).

greatest threat to its fragile social order, and in Faulkner's racialized world, few are capable of surmounting this fear and polarity.

The centrality of the Civil War defeat appears in both major novels by way of the major characters and their roles (or, as in the case of Hightower and Grimm, their missed roles) in it. Despite the social and legislative attempts to enforce the colour line in the South, it is significant that in these novels the issue lies beyond the scope of formal judicial process, and that both Joe Christmas and Charles Bon are murdered, not simply because they are black, but because they embody the menace that white society most fears and that which it cannot distinguish by sight. The Civil War may have formally ended the institution of slavery, but despite the finality of that defeat, the racial injustice continued, was re-orchestrated and modified.

It is my contention that Faulkner's intent is to present the racialized society of the South in his novels, and that by focusing on the tragic lives of Joe Christmas and Charles Bon, the subject and form of the novels correspond with and illuminate that condition.

Faulkner's achievement in Light in August has been summarized by Eric Sundquist as Faulkner's investigation of one major theme, race:

> Light in August is an extended meditation on [the obsession with miscegenation], extended by Faulkner's desire to work out every conceivable variation, on every level he could imagine, within the limits of one sustained narrative. But Faulkner's desperate infusion of form with theme in Light in

> August only releases the full power it holds... when we recall that the novel appeared approximately at the crest of a forty-year wave of Jim Crow laws that grew in part out of a threatened economy, in part out of increasingly vocal demands for black equality during and after World War I, and in greater part out of reawakened racist fears that had, at least in contrast, simmered restlessly for a generation between Reconstruction and the twentieth century (68).

The legislation which became known as "Jim Crow laws" designated separate urban living quarters, washroom facilities, railroad cars, waiting stations, theatre entrances, ticket windows, etc., as "white" and "colored". This segregation existed throughout the South, including the nation's capital, and it coincided with the gradual disenfranchisement of African-Americans.[15] The system was defended by its implementers on the grounds that non-whites would receive the same (or "equivalent") services and amenities in the segregated areas and facilities, which was never the case. (The reverberations and ramifications of this type of legislated segregation have been felt throughout the twentieth century, not only in the United States, but worldwide, particularly in Nazi Germany and in the apartheid laws of South Africa.)

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[15] Since political parties in the United States could restrict voting in state primaries to whites only, the process of disenfranchisement prior to the Jim Crow laws, had been swift and effective. According to Robert Kelley, "The situation in Louisiana alone tells the story: in 1896, 130,000 black men could vote, and in 1904, only 1,300." Robert Kelley, The shaping of the American past from 1865 to the present, Vol. 2 (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1975) 651.

Against this backdrop, Faulkner produced two of the most powerful novels ever written about miscegenation, and by extension, about racial intolerance and the legacy of slavery, which left its indelible mark on the South and the generations of Americans to follow the post-Reconstruction era.

Faulkner's Narrative Methodology

Many critics support the view that Faulkner was intent on achieving meaning through form of his novels[16], whereby the rhetoric of storytelling informs the narrative as much or more than the sequence of events or the thematic content. Yet the application of this theory has not been definitive nor adequately supported by the texts[17]. (In fact, my experience has been that the criticism often compounds the difficulty of delineating Faulkner's thematic focus and intent.) In order to demonstrate the thesis of this paper, I will focus on the major features of Faulkner's narrative in order to illuminate how each modification of conventional narrative form enhances, incorporates and supports the major subjects and themes of the novels, and thereby show how the complexity of the issue under study - race - was matched (enhanced and supported) by equally complex narrative structures.

There are many features common to Faulkner's novels, such as the use of first-person narration and his obsession with time, and these should be discussed in a broader context than the thesis of this paper. An overview of the major criticism will, however, distinguish

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[16] Richard P. Adams, Faulkner: Myth and Motion, (Princeton: U of Princeton P, 1968); Arthur F. Kinney, Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style as Vision (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1978); Ilse Dusoir Lind, "The Design and Meaning of Absalom, Absalom!," PMLA - Modern Language Association Publications LXX (December 1955): 887-912; Baxter Hathaway, "The Meaning of Faulkner's Structures," English Record XV (December 1964): 22-27; Karl Zink, "William Faulkner: Form as Experiment", South Atlantic Quarterly LIII (1954): 384-403.

[17] Cleanth Brooks maintains that the most memorable scenes in Absalom, Absalom! "are given their power by the way in which the novel is structured", but he does not provide any explanation of this theory other than to note that the "deferred and suspended resolutions are necessary if the great scenes are to have their full vigor and significance." Cleanth Brooks, "History and the Sense of the Tragic: Absalom, Absalom!", Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays, Robert Penn Warren, ed., (Princeton: Prentice Hall Inc., 1966) 186-203, 203.

those features of narrative which have been most affected by Faulkner's innovations of narrative style. While the surface or texture of the novels has frequently been regarded as an example of Faulkner's stylistic technique,[18] the selection of narrative devices has been consistently shown to have thematic significance: this would appear to support the argument that Faulkner's choices served a higher purposes than stylistic effect.

Narrative Methodology

In his most complex novels, Faulkner developed a narrative methodology with which to support and enhance his themes, whereby the structure of the novels provides a rhetorical link between form and meaning. Donald Kartiganer concurs that the structure is the first clue to the rhetorical underpinning in Faulkner's novels.[19] Yet while Kartiganer refers to Faulkner's novels as "fragmented", I would suggest that the apparent division of the novels into distinct units is a highly rhetorical device whereby Faulkner holds one image, character or event under maximum scrutiny (sometimes for pages at a time, and/or through numerous repetitions). By holding the image, character or event in suspension from the action of the text, Faulkner first isolates it, and then reintegrates it into the present-time action of the

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[18] "We habitually think of Faulkner as having a single style because all of his writings bear his markedly individual stamp, but this is to overlook the consciously contrived effects within his various works. In The Sound and the Fury, four distinct styles are employed, all scrupulously differentiated, and the short stores are a record of endless stylistic experimentation" (Lind, 898).

[19] Donald M. Kartiganer discusses form as follows: "I refer to the significant structure of a literary work, the way in which the different units relate to each other, the way in which they become part - or fail to - of a coherent whole. Structure is the strategy of these relations, and in Faulkner, whose novels are so highly fragmented, the establishment of relations becomes a crucial issue." Donald M. Kartiganer, The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels, (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1979) xiii.

novel after it has achieved optimum effect, to be referred to again with all of its thematic weight and symbolic import. Chapter IV of Absalom, Absalom! (88-133), for example, is devoted to the presentation of one surviving letter of those Charles Bon had written to Judith Sutpen. Pages 88 to 129 serve as an introduction to the presentation of the letter by Mr. Compson to Quentin, and recapitulate the story of Bon's relationships with both Henry and Judith, his trip to New Orleans with Henry, and both his and Judith's survival of the war. The letter is referred to again at page 207: "Because there was love Mr. Compson said There was that letter she brought and gave to your grandmother to keep." The letter symbolizes the ephemeral nature of the past - as the only testament of the relationship between Bon and Judith, and the personal nature of history - as a link between the Sutpen saga and Quentin. At its most basic interpretive level, the letter confirms Bon's existence, validates his relationship to Judith as conjectured by Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson, and symbolizes the way in which the past is handed down to him from his grandfather and father, from generation to generation. On both a structural and thematic level, the letter more links Judith to Bon, and, indirectly, to Quentin: Judith is as much Faulkner's focus as Henry, for she suffers from her father's duplicity, his rejection of Bon, and Henry's murder of him.

Michael Millgate and others have suggested that there is an intrinsic relationship between what Faulkner wanted to convey (with all its qualifications and permutations), and the way in which he organized and presented his material.[20] While the intensity of

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26 Criticism has revealed the "intricate structural and imagistic patterns which operate within the novels, and shown that the elaboration of the style...possesses an organic relationship with the material of the novels and with their moral and emotional themes." Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner, (New York: Random House, 1963) 288.

Faulkner's style often seems to overshadow his narrative methodology, Millgate maintains that that very methodology is the style:

> We have had frequent occasion to notice Faulkner's tendency to work in blocks of material, so that the structural process became primarily a question of achieving the optimum disposition of relatively discrete units: we can now understand that he always sought for effects of ironic juxtaposition and illuminating reflection, for that constant reverberation to and fro within the novel which makes for thematic as well as emotional intensification.[21]

It is as though Faulkner refused to leave an image or idea in the narrative text until he had fully explored and expanded upon all of its thematic and symbolic possibilities. These are, however, as Millgate suggests, his building blocks, plied with deliberate care and intent, in strategic succession.

Narrative Perspective

Major criticism has shown that narrative perspective and characterization are essential staples of Faulkner's style, and the rhetorical elements in narrative methodology he employed. Warren Beck maintains that the "whole aim is at perspective"[22]: in attempting to

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[21] Millgate, Achievement, 287.

[22] "The accomplishment is the gradual, sustained, and enriched revelation of meaning; in Faulkner's novels drama is the highest form which awaits the unfolding of the composite action, characterizations, mood, and idea, through the medium of style." Warren Beck, "William Faulkner's Style", Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, ed., 53-65, 64.

define Faulkner's style, Beck and other major critics have argued that the form of the novels combined with characterization, subject and narrative perspective, is determined by the author's personal vision and perspective.[23] Faulkner has been credited with the ability to render the "fragments" or "units" of his narrative material thematically cohesive and thereby, to evoke or convey a degree of dynamism and intensity that traditional narratives did not.[24] I would suggest that the most dynamic quality of Faulkner's narrative is that we never really know which narrative perspective or point of view is the "correct" one, and that that ambiguity itself is part of a compounded narrative rhetoric. Faulkner's intention is arguably, not so much to withhold meaning as to avoid concluding absolutely any issue under investigation, and to control the way in which the reader judges the characters and situations of the novel.[25]

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[23] Adams, 3-8.

[24] According to Warren Beck, the stream-of-consciousness technique allows Faulkner to create his trademark "saturated solution" and enables him to posit two conflicting points of view within the same text: "In his most characteristic writing Faulkner is trying to render the transcendent life of the mind, the crowded composite of associative and analytical consciousness which expands the vibrant moment into the reaches of all time, simultaneously observing, remembering, interpreting, and modifying the object of its awareness. To this end the sentence as a rhetorical unit (however strained) is made to hold diverse yet related elements in a sort of saturated solution, which is perhaps the nearest that language as the instrument of fiction can come to the instantaneous complexities of consciousness itself. Faulkner really seems to be trying to give narrative prose another dimension." Warren Beck, Faulkner (Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1976) 47.

[25] "By means of a few strokes of realistic dialogue, the narrators are established as real; once established, they become the instruments of Faulkner's own poetic formulation of his material. Thus, while we must take each narration in its own terms, making allowance for the disposition of the teller, all the mythologizing is unified by the dominance of a single rhetorical style" (Lind, 899).

Subject

Another difficulty with Faulkner criticism is that the subject and themes of Faulkner's novels seem to be so regionally and culturally specific that critics have tended to focus on the particularities of Faulkner's novels, rather than on the universality of his narrative methodology, and the rhetorical use of the microcosmic world of the South (as envisaged in Yoknapatawpha) to address the condition of human existence. An investigation into the interaction and interdependence of the major elements of narrative should allow us to delineate the meaning of the novels through the rhetoric of narrative structure and Faulkner's ordering of material. While this would seem to be a daunting task in light of the density of his narratives, the subject matter is no longer cryptic nor elusive (if it ever was), and presumably less intimidating at the end of the twentieth century than it was at the beginning.[26] Equipped with a sensitized vocabulary and socio-political dialogue with which to address the issue of race, it is assumed that the contemporary critic has been empowered to revisit those literary texts which focus on that issue. By delineating those features of style and narrative organization which predominate in Faulkner's narrative poetics, I wish to establish the context in which the major themes of Faulkner's novels should be discussed. Given the complexity of the issues addressed, and the highly rhetorical narrative methodology employed by the author, this study must begin at the most fundamental and basic analysis of the texts. For this reason, I have reviewed a range of criticism from

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[26] "Faulkner's narratives utter a truth of merging across social boundaries that his contemporaries found unspeakable. Faulkner himself set this truth in an elusive, complex discourse of indirection, a literary disfigurement of divisive social figures." James A. Snead, "Light in August and the Rhetorics of Racial Division", Faulkner and Race, Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, eds., 152-169, 152.

narratology to thematic to deconstructive theories for their applicability to Faulkner's novels.[27]

Given the experimental nature of Faulkner's novels, narratology seems inapplicable to the present discussion, since it addresses the elements of narrative in their "traditional" roles, with "form" viewed merely as "the interpreter's rage for order"[28]. Indeed, as Ian MacKenzie asserts:

> Narratology has undeniably produced a series of useful competing systems for analysing the events of a plot, for reconstructing a story, and for classifying forms of characterization, narration, focalization, and modes of speech representation. What narratology has not produced is a convincing account of the essential intuitive leap from a series of events to an underlying theme. Indeed narratology now seems to be heading in another direction: toward the exclusive analysis of discourse and the denial that narratives tell stories at all.[29]

It would seem, at some point, impossible to discuss the role of form (the author's use and ordering of material) in determining meaning in the novel, when that meaning is derived, in

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[27] Of particular interest is Donald Kartiganer's discussion of "Faulkner and Modernism" in his work, The Fragile Thread, 159-185.

[28] Christopher Norris, ed., Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (New York: Routledge, 1990) 22.

[29] Ian MacKenzie, "Narratology and Thematics" Modern Fiction Studies, 33 (Autumn, 1987): 535-544, 541. He maintains that narratology operations "cannot adequately deal with the thematic interest that generally inspires our acts of responding to narratives" (544).

part, from that form.[30] We must concede, therefore, as de Man suggests, that the literary act is an act of authorial creativity, and that the form of the novel must necessarily reflect the author's concerns, ideas and focus.[31]

According to Arthur Kinney, Faulkner's genius in experimentation can best be appreciated within the context of "traditional" narrative structures:

> The brilliant aperçu that each scene, each chapter, each confrontation in a novel by Faulkner correlates to all the other scenes, chapters, and confrontations, analogous to parts and a synecdoche for the whole, is surely basic to Faulkner's narrative poetics. But Faulkner does not dismiss those traditional structures...rather, he uses traditional linear arrangements of fiction as an understood subtext toward which the reader is always driving his impressions and judgments...[32]

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[30] According to Seymour Chatman, "The source of a narrative text's whole structure of meaning - not only its assertion and denotation but also of its implication, connotation, and ideological nexus - is the implied author." Seymour Chatman, Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film (New York: Cornell U P, 1990) 75.

[31] In his discussion of Roland Barthes, Paul de Man notes: "He, too, defines writing, or form, as the faithful reflection of the writer's free and signifying experience. It is true, though, that for him this form is not necessarily an object; when human actions are historically free, form is transparent. It is an object but not an object of reflection. But the moment this freedom is curtailed, the artist's endeavour and his choice of form become problematic; any restriction in the free choice of experience requires a justification of the form selected, an operation whose net effect is the genuine objectification of form." Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism, 2nd ed. revised, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1983) 234. He maintains that "from the point of view of criticism, the result is the same, since in both instances [Barthes and Richards], criticism begins and ends with the study of form" (234).

[32] Arthur F. Kinney, Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style as Vision (Amherst: University of Massachusetts P, 1978), Preface xiii.

As evidenced by his early novels, The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, the first-person narrative perspective and the use of character/narrators are two of the most important structural elements in Faulkner's narrative. By using character/narrators, Faulkner manages to compound the thematic weight and rhetorical significance of his narrative. Although Faulkner used the third-person narrative stance in Light in August, he employed various shifts in the narrative perspective (with reference to what the characters are thinking). The varying perspectives became essential structural tools, especially in Absalom, Absalom! where there are numerous shifts in narrative perspective throughout sections allocated to individual narrators to the extent that there are reminders as to which character/narrator is the speaker: Miss Rosa's section is "punctuated" with the phrase "They will have told you..." to reinforce the significance of the exchange between Miss Rosa and Quentin as oral history, to authenticate what she relates of her own history (through the perspective of the town and/or Quentin's family as "they"), and how these facts have become known to her, to Quentin, and to his family through successive generations, and time.

In his discussion of Faulkner's "stylized characterization", Peter Swiggart maintains that "Faulkner is forced to rely heavily upon features of style and narrative organization that illuminate not so much the characters themselves as their significance."[33] Swiggart then qualifies this statement by saying that "in Faulkner's hands the interior-monologue technique helps to establish a sense of psychological realism and thus counteract the extreme stylization of character and situation" (23). In other words, Faulkner's characters, while believable, serve a greater symbolic purpose in the development of theme in the novels. Realism per se

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[33] Peter Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels, (Austin: U of Texas P, 1962), 21.

is not Faulkner's aim: he wants to elucidate the South, evoke it, flesh it out. This would include both "reliable" or "unreliable" character/narrators whose representational value is significant to the rhetoric of the narrative whole, such as Rosa Coldfield's demonizing of Thomas Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom! - the first impression Faulkner provides us of the central character.[34] This is, however, consistent with Beck's view that the purpose of the first-person narrator is "the attainment of detached perspective and the creation of realistic illusion concerning large vistas of the story."[35] It is essential to the allegorical aim of Absalom, Absalom! that Sutpen be initially portrayed by Miss Rosa as the evil plantation owner who married a "suitable" woman from the town (Miss Rosa's sister, Ellen) for status and respectability. Sutpen's story may then be told from the more detached perspectives of General and Mr. Compson, in contrast to Miss Rosa's formidably impassioned view.

Discussions about "unreliable narrators" take on a completely different meaning within the context of Faulkner's novels, where the bias and limitations of his character/narrators is essential to his rhetoric.[36] Frank Stanzel argues that the first person

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[34] It is interesting to note Félix Martinez-Bonati's view that "if the basic narrator were to make contradictory assertions referring to one and the same individual circumstance, the imaginary effort of the reader to constitute the pertinent feature of the narrated world would collapse" since in Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner seems to deliberately inflate and deflate the image of Thomas Sutpen throughout, collapsing the moral fabric of the character in Miss Rosa's narrative, and re-creating it in the narratives of Quentin's father and grandfather. Félix Martinez-Bonati, trans. Philip W. Silver, Fictive Discourse and the Structures of Literature: A Phenomenological Approach, (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1981) 106.

[35] Beck, "William Faulkner's Style", Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, ed., 65.

[36] Thus the difficulty with Chatman's discussion of such narrators: "He delivers what he understands to be a single, straightforward message, but the implied reader must infer that the ostensible message is being concealed or at least called into question by an underlying message that the narrator does not understand. The narrative is being ironized in the *act* of narrating. Much of the effect rests on the implied reader's understanding that the narration is unconscious or at least

novel is a unique category in which we should take "the narrative situation as its most important structural feature.[37] In this way, discussions of the traditional role of the first-person narrator do, however, enhance our understanding of how, in contrast, Faulkner's first-person narrators incorporate and further his thematic intent.[38] Conrad Aikin maintains that "Mr. Faulkner could say with Henry James that it is practically impossible to make any real distinction between theme and form"[39], and I would suggest that the way in which the material is presented reveals as much about the aim of the work than the actual plot and chronology of events. The plot is so readily apparent in the opening chapters of these novels, that the re-ordering of material is highly rhetorical; it is a deliberate tactic employed to obscure the issues under review in order that their full thematic import may be realized. The apparent circulatory of this argument notwithstanding, the notion of a relationship between form and meaning often seems to be revolutionary in Faulkner criticism.

Wayne C. Booth concludes in his work, The Rhetoric of Fiction, that any discussion of "subject matter, structure and technique depend finally on notions of purpose or function

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ambivalent about the duplicity, distortion, or naivete of his account" (Chatman, 153).

[37] Frank Stanzel, Narrative Situations in the Novel: Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses, James P. Pusack, trans., (Bloomington/London: Indiana UP, 1971) 59.

[38] "In the narrative situation of the first-person novel the temporal distance from the narrative act to the experiences of the experiencing self constitutes the distance to the narrated material. Insofar as this interval of narrative distance is designated it forms an important element in the structure of the first person novel. The narrative distance is the measure, as it were, of the interval between narrating and experiencing self" (Stanzel, 65).

[39] Conrad Aiken, "William Faulkner: The Novel as Form", Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays, Robert Penn Warren, ed., (Princeton: Prentice Hall Inc., 1966): 46-52, 49.

or effect".[40] Accordingly, it could be argued that any narrative device is rhetorical, yet in Faulkner's major novels, the narrative form so consistently supports and modifies the subject and themes of the novels that the structural innovations cannot be attributed merely to stylistic creativity. Arthur Kinney has suggested that "Once we find the theme that is Faulkner's structural principle, his novels are instantly more comprehensible" (73). The structural patterns in the narrative reinforce Faulkner's intent: by distinguishing between Faulkner's stylistic innovations and the rhetoric of his narrative methodology, the author's thematic focus becomes clear: we can then return to the texts to decide whether his "experiment" succeeded or not.[41]

Analyses of Faulkner's style have focused on his sentence structure, and his use of the sentence as his chief rhetorical unit has been discussed in the context of the southern story telling technique.[42] He used it throughout his novels to optimal effect, notably, the "parallel phrases, the repetitions, the circling of the subject, or the piling up of

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[40] Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961) 57.

[41] Beck maintains that "the widely proclaimed frustrations over Faulkner's style will be dispelled once his point of view is grasped, for this style is a powerful instrument handled for the most part with great skill for the realization of his ideas." Beck, Faulkner, 6.

[42] "The rhetorical style of Absalom, Absalom! is essential to its conception, excessive as it may at times appear when it fails in that perfect felicity in which rhetoric is never questioned. The use of polysyllabics and involved - usually periodic - sentences, while natural to the author, is not a surrender to the line of least resistance. Prefixes and suffixes, especially those containing liquids and nasals in combination with vowels, lend sonorous enrichment; sentence units into which are enfolded a series of phrases and clauses which must be gathered sequentially into the mind before the release of meaning afforded in a final verb, are a means of approximating poetic rhythm in prose medium" (Lind, 899).

adjectives".[43] Once the correlation between Faulkner's style and form in the context of this tradition becomes clear, we see that Faulkner's aim was to incorporate the elements of narrative in order to intensify and enhance the major subjects and themes of his novels.[44] Aiken applies his earlier analysis to a discussion of Faulkner's sentence structure:

> They parallel in a curious and perhaps inevitable way...the whole elaborate method of deliberately withheld meaning, of progressive and partial and delayed disclosure which so often gives the characteristic shape to the novels themselves. It is a consistent offering of obstacles, a calculated system of screens and obtrusions...to keep the form - and the idea - fluid and unfinished...until the dropping into place of the very last syllable (48).

Faulkner's methodology, however, would appear to keep the focus on the developing narrative, rather than the "dropping into place of the very last syllable" or the outcome of the plot, which, as I will discuss later, is usually revealed early in the text. Aiken concedes that the "length and elaborateness of the sentence structure" may be a result of Faulkner's attempt "to try to tell us everything, absolutely everything, every last origin or source or quality or qualification" (48). I would argue that this illusion of investigating the "truth" and "meaning" is an attempt to deliberately obscure the issues, and forms a vital part of the

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[43] William Van O'Connor, "Rhetoric in Southern Writing: Faulkner", The Georgia Review, XII (Spring, 1958) 83-86, reprinted in William Faulkner, Dean Morgan Schmitter, ed., (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973) 53-57, 55.

[44] John Bradbury has written, "Everything has been heightened in Faulkner, as in Melville, to achieve a supranatural legendary or mythic effect. His portentious style, built of cumulative sentences with paired and tripled adjectives and heavy repetitions, suspenseful withholdings, and stepped-up metaphors, constantly supports the more than human proportions of his figures." John Bradbury, Renaissance in the South, (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1963) 52.

narrative rhetoric. The multitude of qualifications are meant to compound issues so that nothing may be taken at face value.[45] Since there is rarely an idea or event which does not have a qualifier or modifier at another point in the novel, nothing may be determined in absolute terms.

Structure

I would concur with John Matthews that one of the most important features of Faulkner's narrative poetics is "framing"[46], whereby what precedes a narrative section is as significant as what it contains, and that the placement and ordering of large sections of narrative has a dramatic impact on what follows, and, more importantly in Faulkner, on what has preceded.[47] Although Faulkner appears to have exercised tremendous freedom in the ordering of his material, we shall see that the choice of form (which includes narrative

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[45] Donald Kartiganer distinguishes between form as technical matters such as narrative point of view, etc.: "I refer rather to the significant structure of a literary work, the way in which the different units relate to each other, the way in which they become part - or fail to - of a coherent whole. Structure is the strategy of these relations, and in Faulkner, whose novels are so highly fragmented, the establishment of relations becomes a crucial issue" (xiii).

[46] John T. Matthews discusses framing as a "narrative component" with respect to the use of the narrative of Quentin Compson in "That in Evening Sun", in "Faulkner's Narratives Frames", Faulkner and the Craft of Fiction: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1987, Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, eds. (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1989) 71-91.

[47] This circularity is constant in Faulkner criticism. Olga Vickery maintains that "If Faulkner is indeed concerned not only to explore the range of possibility in character but to probe for its essential humanity...he must have complete freedom to proceed in any order, in any temporal or spatial direction, and to recall and reexamine any action, situation or character perspective. Consequently, he experiments endlessly not because...he is interested in form and technique as values in themselves but because no single method can accomplish his purposes of rendering the unique figure of his carpet." Olga Vickery, The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation, (Louisiana: Louisiana State UP, 1964) 298.

perspective and the use of character/narrators) is determined largely by his thematic concerns. In order for the narrative to produce the desired result, the text must be structured in a conscious and deliberate manner so that what is meant or intended is realized. An example is the delayed introduction of Joe Christmas and Thomas Sutpen in their respective texts: their pasts are unknowable, obscure, yet ultimately damning to both these individuals and the world around them. In order for all of the elements of narrative to work cohesively, Faulkner managed to incorporate his ideas into structures which consistently supported and reflected those themes which he and his character/narrators explored.

In his major novels, Faulkner usually presents the entire plot in the first few chapters of the novels. He does not begin Light in August with the central story of Joe Christmas, but rather, begins Joe Christmas' story at Chapter 6 with the line "Memory believes before knowing remembers." In the opening chapters of the novel, he introduces the central characters by way of capsulized historical summations (initially from the town's perspective), and discloses the town's discovery of Joanna's murder, and the fact that Joe Christmas, who lived on her property, is believed to be part Negro. Before this saga unfolds, however, a structural framework is established through the character of Lena Grove, and it is significant that Faulkner begins and ends the novel with her, not, as often suggested, for comic relief, but in order to portray the compassion and decency of the townspeople (who react to the plight of a young, pregnant woman travelling alone, on foot in the deep South of the 1930's), beginning with Mr. and Mrs. Armstid who provide food, shelter and money, Byron Bunch who assists in delivering her baby, and the travelling salesman from Tennessee who drives Byron and Lena out of Jefferson, and whose musings with his wife end the novel. Through

Lena, Faulkner frames the novel with the best qualities of human kindness and concern, and it is against this backdrop, that he portrays the worst aspects of racial hatred and intolerance.

When it is necessary within the context of the novel, to display past events which have a direct impact upon the present action, the device of flashback is used. According to the manuscripts and revised texts, it appears that the "flashback" was used to fill in the personal history of Joe Christmas in Light in August.[48] One might argue, however, that all present narration in that novel serves as a counterpoint for the central story (and past) of Joe Christmas, which constitutes the bulk of the novel. Again, the underpinning and framing of this central story is vital to our appreciation of the racial issues and social forces at work in the novel. The past begins at the climax of the present action, the death of Joanna Burden - the point at which all other major characters become involved in the present action.[49] In this way, the story of Joe Christmas is "predicated" by the discovery of Joanna's murder and the discovery that he is part Negro. The ramifications of this discovery, as it affects Joe Christmas' past and future, is revealed through the flashback which modifies all present time narration and the developing plot lines. This "flashback" of Joe Christmas' story is effective because the "framing" narratives - those focusing largely on Hightower in Chapters 3, 4 and 13, are incorporated (through Hightower's friendship with Byron Bunch) into the present-

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[48] Regina K. Fadiman, Faulkner's *Light in August*: A Description and Interpretation of the Revisions (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1975) 11: "It is my firm conclusion, after adding up the evidence in the [Virginia] manuscript, that Faulkner had written most of the story of the narrative present before he composed the long Christmas flashback."

[49] "As time passes within such a flashback it subtly becomes the very recent past, a part of the story not known before and so, structurally wedded to the novel. In time, it returns in mid-chapter exactly to the present moment abandoned pages ago and re-establishes the old foreground. It is a brilliant narrative device with sound structural and psychological validity" (Zink, 392).

time action of the novel; the present-time action is restored without sacrificing the thematic juxtapositions established by the flashback segments.

While Karl Zink identifies point of view and "suspended syntax" as two staples of Faulkner's novels, he also emphasizes the use of repetition, or "accretion", as a staple structural feature of Faulkner's novels. Zink believes that the flashback works "in conjunction with and as a part of the method of incremental repetition"[50], and while repetition may not be intended to convey truth, it may emphasize what is believed to be true as established in previous narration, or reinforce the pivotal significance of an event, and force a re-evaluation of the narrative text as a whole.[51] Arthur Kinney asserts that "This sense of the novel as a series of discrete scenes which through repetition, parallelism, and juxtaposition intimate a broader meaning for the whole is fundamental to Faulkner's narrative poetics" (4). Moreland calls this "revisionary repetition", which he describes as follows: "Revisionary repetition repeats some structured event, in order somehow to alter that structure and its power, especially by opening a critical space for what the subject might learn about that structure in the different context of a changing present or a more distant or different past" (64).

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[50] Zink, 391, and previously at 385: "Working together as they do, they sacrifice, or at least seriously modify, the conventional narrative line of chronological development in which a major and a minor plot are alternately forwarded toward resolution."

[51] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan notes that the murder of Charles Bon by Henry Sutpen in Absalom, Absalom! is narrated thirty-nine times. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics, (New York: Methuen & Co, 1983) 57.

Characterization

The development of narrative perspective relies heavily upon characterization in the novels: Kinney maintains that "Faulkner shapes his work to reveal the visions of his characters; their visions thus become his style" (6).[52] While it would appear that Faulkner fully exploits his characters as vehicles for his major themes, his characters must represent and embody, through their language and actions, some application of these ideas. Their representational value and rhetorical import, however, seldom overwhelm their psychological complexity, mainly because of the strength of the plot. Peter Swiggart maintains that:

> Faulkner's narrative achievements may be explained in terms of his ability to express abstract themes by means of stylized characters without detracting from the dramatic force, and the apparent realism of his narrative situations. Arbitrary stylization is compensated for in his work by the creation of characters who have explicit symbolic functions... . The desire to both humanize his characters and to magnify their symbolic importance is responsible for Faulkner's numerous experiments with the interior monologue and other devices involving point of view of narration.[53]

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[52] Kinney sees characterization and narrative stances as combined forces: "Faulkner takes us into such acts as perceiving, whether presented in first or third person, in soliloquy, interior monologue, or omniscient narration: not only do we share the thoughts of his characters, but we also share the movement, quiescence, turbulence, tension, straining, bewilderment and repetition that indicate their sensory and intellectual responses" (6).

[53] Peter Swiggart, The Art of Faulkner's Novels, (Austin: U of Texas P, 1961) 5; "His favourite technique is to conceal the stylized function of a major character until the reader has become familiar with what is assumed to be a realistic social atmosphere. ... But when the complexities of style and symbolism are penetrated, the reader discovers that each item is part of an artistic whole." He suggests that "The gothic individuality of Joe Christmas and Thomas Sutpen would be a discordant

I would argue that Faulkner's characterization withstands his innovations of narrative form and that the symbolic significance of his characters evolves naturally from this two-fold purpose - illuminating theme as subject in the novels, and revealing the thematic significance of form and structure in the first-person narratives. In Faulkner's novels, plot and characterization are developed to optimal thematic potential and in that very role, support the innovations of narrative technique imposed upon the text.[54] It would appear that Light in August, with the benefit of a third-person narrator throughout, is the more accessible work, while Absalom, Absalom! (with its multiple narrative perspectives), is often frustratingly complex, yet the design of both novels is equally rhetorical and thematically dense. The increasing narrative complexity in these two novels parallels Faulkner's investigation of a complex issue - the South, in all its myriad complexities - incest, racism, miscegenation. The structural and thematic integrity of these novels makes them compelling and important.

As early as The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner's preoccupation with race is apparent, as is his preoccupation with the constraints of human existence in time and the notion that "There is no such thing as was -- only is."[55] Robert Penn Warren has written that "if Faulkner feels the past as the repository of great images of human effort and integrity, he

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element in realistic fiction. But in Light in August and Absalom, Absalom! their stylization supports and is supported by Faulkner's thematic analysis of the quilt-ridden puritan South" (5).

[54] "Faulkner's novels seem so full of conscious and unconscious perceptions that there is, surprisingly, a minimum of fact. Instead there are many apparent facts which, when pressed, are mere illusion. Storytelling and rumour replace observation; judgment and member displace witnessed knowledge" (Kinney, 7).

[55] James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner (New York: Random House, 1968) 255.

also sees it as the source of a dynamic evil"[56]. This type of juxtaposition is a consistent indicator of Faulkner's thematic intent.

The Sound and the Fury reveals Faulkner's early correlation of the narrative with his central themes: e.g., the first person and stream-of-consciousness narrative technique combine with a lack of cohesion between the chapters/narrative segments of the novels to reflect the emotional and psychological isolation of the individuals, both within the family structure and society. The tone of the novel is bitter and unredemptive, with the narrative almost entirely in the first-person or stream-of-consciousness perspective. In contrast, Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!, comprise an expanded universe and extend over broader periods of time, from before the Civil War, until the present time of the novels. They also include more stylized characters with greater rhetorical weight.

The predominance of the past in the later novels is achieved by initially establishing our perspective in the present time of the novels.[57] The form and structure of these novels

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[56] Robert Penn Warren, "Faulkner: The South, the Negro and Time", Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays, Robert Penn Warren, ed., (Princeton, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1966) 251-271, 269.

[57] "While As I Lay Dying resists our desire for the single, fixable perspective of illusionist space...Light in August resists the same desire by refusing to allow us to follow any single action through to its completion. Each story necessitates another, until plot lines seem to spread out indefinitely. Moreover, we are set down in medias res so that as we move forward in time, we double back further and further into the past. In Light in August, it becomes clear that Faulkner's manipulation of perspective is ultimately involved with his interest in time. If we compare this novel with The Sound and the Fury, we can begin to see the relation between time and perspective." Carolyn Porter, "Faulkner and His Reader," Faulkner: The Unappeased Imagination, Glenn O. Carey, ed., (New York: Whitston Publishing Co., 1980) 233.

is designed to reinforce and ensure that perspective.[58] Kartiganer maintains that Faulkner's subsequent novels, "are conceived as studies in fragmentation, violently juxtaposed stations of a broken world, apparently drawn together only by a common subject of concern or by parallel actions informing distinctly separate stories."[59] Under careful scrutiny, however, the juxtapositions are more apparent than real. As Malcolm Bradbury notes:

> "Time", the interlocking of the present and past, personal and public histories, is actually an essential mystery in Faulkner's work. In these central novels...there is a recurrent structure of a continuous present behind which are stacked up different layers of time, validated in the story by a variety of justifications. ... Yet beyond all this there is an experimental author extremely and self-consciously interested in his own rhetoric and structure, his own power to generate form.[60]

This is also achieved through the use of what Karl Zink refers to as the "psychologically appropriate flashback", which "creates a unique texture or surface for the Faulkner novel, a surface which is although linear, a kind of montage of juxtaposed episodes and themes commenting implicitly on one another and giving off meaning through the suggestive power of implication... (319).

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[58] Robert Dale Parker, Absalom, Absalom!: The Questioning of Fictions (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), in his discussion of narrative shifts between what he refers to as "time present and time past" whereby the narrative shifts in each section to characters in a different "time present" discussing a different "time past" (31-33).

[59] Donald M. Kartiganer, "The Sound and the Fury and Faulkner's Quest for Form", English Language History 37 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970): 613-639, 613.

[60] Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern American Novel, New Edition (New York: Penguin Group, 1992) 116.

While it would appear that each section of The Sound and the Fury is disconnected, the reconstruction of events is arrived at through repetition and the focus on Caddy.[61] The obsession with past time and with the doomed sister Caddy thematically links each section of the novel and permits each brother only a very tenuous hold (if any) on present-time reality. Sundquist maintains that "the novel's strategy, in both dramatic and formal terms, is to portray a shattering of belief and to depict the urgent failure of modern consciousness to sustain any useful moral or temporal structures" (13). He also explores what he terms Faulkner's strategy of "expansion", whereby the narrative structure is built upon successive first-person narrations, a methodology developed in The Sound and the Fury.[62]

Although the most striking feature of The Sound and the Fury is Faulkner's use of the stream-of-consciousness technique, the presumed immediacy of this device is elusive, and results in an initial lack of clarity in the first two sections of the novel. This device does, however, enable Faulkner to portray events of the past and present that are linked seemingly randomly in the subconscious minds of the characters. The mental and emotional turmoil in the minds of Benjy and Quentin are reflected in the textual surface of the narrative, and

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[61] Peter Messent maintains that "it is by way of such a disruption of narrative conventions that some of [Faulkner's] most powerful and radical effects are realized." Peter Messent, New Readings of the American Novel: Narrative Theory and its Application, (London: MacMillan Education Literature, 1990), 56.

[62] "In the cases of Light in August and Absalom, Absalom! ... stories not only arise by a method of analogical creation that virtually brings them into being at the moment they are required, but they also fuse with and "tell" one another's tales. As they are held at a point of merged and approximate conflict, the stories inhabit the form of the novel and absolutely determine it, in each instance complicating and extending the method Faulkner discovered in The Sound and the Fury of turning his novels into haunted chambers of consciousness, a discovery the anarchic arena of remembered voices in Benjy's section lucidly defines." Sundquist, 15.

produce an initial disorientation in time and setting. In order for the reader to distinguish between past and present, italics are used in Benjy and Quentin's sections when shifts in time occur. This, on another level, also reveals Benjy's inability to discriminate between past and present, and how "memory obsessively intrudes" into the present. The surface of the narrative reflects this continuum of flux from past to present in the minds of the narrators.[63] Benjy's confinement to the fenced-in yard of the Compson property not only symbolizes his inability to communicate, but also his entrapment in the past with Caddy and in the present without her.[64]

Millgate maintains that "the powerfully evoked individuality of the three first-person narrators, each locked in his own kind of unreality and remoteness, tends to result in a certain lack of over-all cohesion in the novel"[65], yet this tone of "remoteness" is appropriate to the theme of powerlessness in the novel. William Handy's comments concerning time in As I Lay Dying, could apply equally to The Sound and the Fury:

> Faulkner has made his fictional technique much more than the depiction of events. He has produced a symbolic form capable of expressing a deeper dimension of what it means to live in time. ... For Faulkner, the time of inner

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[63] "The consciousness of each character becomes the actual agent illuminating and being illuminated by the central situation. Everything is immobilized in this pattern; there is no development of either character or plot in the traditional manner. By fixing the structure while leaving the central situation ambiguous, Faulkner forces the reader to reconstruct the story and to apprehend its significance for himself" (Vickery, 29).

[64] Lawrence Edward Bowling, "Faulkner and the Theme of Isolation," (Georgia Review, Vol. 18, Spring, 1964) 51-52.

[65] Michael Millgate, "The Problem of Point of View", Patterns of Commitment in American Literature, Marston LaFrance, ed., (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1967) 184.

> awareness measures the intensity of human experience, not its order of succession.[66]

While Quentin is also obsessed with and confined by time (symbolized in the second section of the novel by his grandfather's watch), as Bowling asserts, "In contrast to Benjy who expends most of his efforts in an attempt to break out of his isolation and to communicate with the world around him, Quentin struggles to achieve isolation by escaping from the world of concrete reality" (55): yet what each of the brothers desires is a return to childhood, and all present events are filtered and judged in the subconscious through this perspective. Accordingly to Millgate, it is appropriate that Caddy remain elusive or vague in the novel since she symbolizes the past childhoods which can never return: "It was an essential element in Faulkner's overall conception of the novel that Caddy never be seen directly but only through the eyes of her three brothers, each with his own self-centred demands to make upon her, each with his own limitations and obsessions".[67] In the same way that Faulkner obscures or delays the introduction of major characters in his later novels, he waits until the third section of the novel before describing Caddy in present time, through the narrative perspective of Jason who despises her.

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[66] William Handy, Modern Fiction: A Formalist Approach, (Illinois: Southern Illinois UP, 1971) 77. He continues: "For what is also recognized is the two-fold nature of human consciousness, the recognition that we live simultaneously in the world of external happenings as well as in the world of inner awareness, and that the order of events in the one is fundamentally different from the order of events in the other. Faulkner's task has been the simultaneous presentation of both; here is the subject matter for the novel" (77).

[67] Millgate, Achievement, 98.

It is significant that the focus of the novel is on the characters as children, since they are vulnerable and impressionable. Quentin's memories of focus on Caddy to the degree that she becomes the personification of his feelings of imprisonment and victimization:

> When I was little there was a picture in one of our books, a dark place into which a single weak ray of light came slanting upon two faces lifted out of the shadow. ...I'd have to turn back to it until the dungeon was mother herself and Father upward into weak light holding hands and us lost somewhere below even then without even a ray of light. (191)

The fact that the children are isolated and unprotected, evokes the foreboding of doom which awaits them both, (and, as we shall see in the novels which follow The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner uses the knowledge of their demise to enhance his allegorization of the doomed South). Millgate notes that Quentin's reflections about Caddy symbolize the degree to which Quentin has become disillusioned with life:

> Throughout the section...Quentin's mind runs on his father almost as much as it does on Caddy. The irony of this situation, however, and a major cause of Quentin's tragedy, is that just as his mother failed him as a source of love so his father fails him utterly in all his roles... He has become, indeed, Quentin's principal enemy, his cold and even cynical logic persistently undermining the very basis of all those idealistic concepts to which Quentin so passionately holds (Achievement, 95).

It has been argued that Quentin's inability to act results from his rigid adherence to a coded behaviour, yet it also represents his inability to live in present time, since any development or change would invalidate or diminish the powerful hold of the past and his present obsessions.[68] Quentin's dilemma (and that of Benjy and Jason) serves as an allegory of the South's inability to move forward and relinquish the false security associated with the past.

The more conventional, grammatical composition of Jason's section represents a major shift in the narrative, and is appropriate to his harsh pronouncements against members of the household, and events of the past (such as Caddy's abandonment of her daughter, and Quentin's suicide at Harvard). Jason judges and denounces through a more immediate, seemingly rational ordering of events than that of his brothers. As Wayne Booth points out, however, this "factual clarity" is a deliberate structural device of an extreme narrative shift with which, by contrast, we are compelled to reassess the preceding narrative sections.[69] Although Jason, too, is obsessed with his sister (and his niece), his cynicism contrasts with the emotionally overwrought passages of his brothers: of Quentin's suicide, he states, "I says no I never had university advantages because at Harvard they teach you how to go for a swim at night without knowing how to swim" (211). Yet for all the illusion of control,

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[68] "Quentin's own obsession with time derives primarily from his recognition of it as the dimension in which change occurs. His search is for a means of arresting time at a moment of achieved perfection, a moment when he and Caddy could be eternally together in the simplicity of their childhood relationships..." (Millgate, Achievement, 95).

[69] Booth, 306-307.

Jason's rage parallels the emotional frustration and confusion of his brothers.[70] He is equally trapped and obsessed by his powerlessness:

> Of his niece he did not think at all, nor the arbitrary valuation of the money. Neither of them had had entity or individuality for him for ten years; together they merely symbolized the job in the bank of which he had been deprived before he ever got it. (321)

Traditionally, the bank would symbolize the exploitation of the defeated South by the North: Jason's inability to secure a position in the bank parallels his inability to advance into the modern era. This, he blames entirely on Caddy, not his own shortcomings, in much the same way that the South could not look beyond its lost riches and see the moral corruption which precipitated its demise.

The symbols of a past time to which Benjy and Quentin so fervently hold have the same confining effect on Jason. He perceives his present circumstances as the direct result of past mistakes and the burden of responsibility for his family. Olga Vickery maintains that "the theme of The Sound and the Fury as revealed by the structure, is the relation between the act and man's apprehension of the act, between the event and the interpretation"[71], yet

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[70] "One of the greatnesses of the novel is that Faulkner so well manipulates our reactions to these characters - through prose, rhythms, diction, and selection of episodes - that we hardly realize that Quentin's concerns are also Jason's; that the problems of honor, time and human delicacy fall with more weight on Jason's shoulders than they ever did on Quentin's." Linda Welshimer Wagner, "Faulkner's Fiction: Studies in Organic Form", (The Journal of Narrative Technique, Vol 1, 1, January, 1971: pp 1-13) 4-5.

[71] Vickery, 29. She continues: "The relation is by no means a rigid or inelastic thing but it is a matter of shifting perspective, for, in a sense, each man creates his own truth" (29).

Faulkner is clearly focusing on what lies between the two. The narrative suggests that only a limited or qualified interpretation is possible since each character is limited and confined by his own obsessions, time, and circumstance.

The description of Dilsey Gibson is presented in the third-person narrative stance in the fourth and final section of the novel, and contrasts the increasing chaos of the Compson household. Not only does Dilsey adapt to the missing hours on the kitchen clock, she appeases Jason, Mrs. Compson and Benjy, all while maintaining a modicum of order in the Compson household. While Faulkner's description of Dilsey does not romanticize her role in the household, her position as a supporting pillar of the family is clear. It is Dilsey's constant chastisement of Luther to mind Benjy, and Jason's denunciation of the burden of supporting Dilsey and her family, that remind us of the racial division not only within the Compson household, but the world at large. In each instance, Jason's futility at home and in the town, mirrors the larger problem of adapting to the new South in a highly-racialized, emotionally-charged environment where inevitably blacks would bear the brunt of the white's wrath. The final images of the novel - Jason's futile pursuit of Quentin, and Benjy's howling rage in the town square - is one of powerlessness. As testimony to the illusion of control by the white race, Faulkner's biographical notation for Dilsey reads simply, "They endured."

The appendices which Faulkner provided to the novel attest to his desire to expand upon the characters and themes in the novel, yet as it stands, the narrative segments of the three brothers flesh out the central story of Caddy sufficiently to provide an image of tragedy - a ruined life amid the ruined South - from her childhood and puberty in Benjy's section,

her young adulthood in Quentin's section, and her middle age in Jason's. The final segment does not expand upon Caddy's further demise, but instead focuses on the ruination of the household order and chaos in the wake of Quentin's flight. It is expected that her departure, like that of her mother, will only further weaken the fragile foundation upon which the household stands. The parallels to the predicament of the South are numerous, and it is significant that Faulkner chose to end the novel with an image of lunacy and impotence.

"That Evening Sun"

The short story "That Evening Sun" was published in a collection of short stories entitled These 13 (1931), and is set in the South at the turn of the century.[72] The story can be read as a lament of the legacy of slavery and the colour line - the division of the races - as symbolized in the story by a ditch bordering "Negro Hollow" and the white section of town. The first-person narration is set fifteen years later, and begins with an indictment against corporate America (the industrial North) in its encroachment of life in the South, as summarized by the doomed spokesman of the South, Quentin Compson[73]:

> Monday is no different from any other weekday in Jefferson now. The streets are paved now, and the telephone and electric companies are cutting down more and more of the shade trees -- the water oaks, the maples and locusts and elms -- to make room for iron poles bearing clusters of bloated and ghostly and bloodless grapes, and we have a city laundry which makes the rounds on Monday morning ... and even the Negro women who still take in white people's washing after the old custom, fetch and deliver it in automobiles. (391)

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[72] I have cited the text of the short story published in The Portable Faulkner, Revised Edition, Malcolm Cowley, ed., (New York: The Viking P, 1967): 391-410.

[73] To Faulkner, the loss of shade tress represented the destruction of a way of life. Lamenting the loss of shade trees and the impending destruction of the courthouse in Oxford, Mississippi, Faulkner complained to the editor of the Oxford Eagle that "all we have left now to distinguish an old southern town from any one of ten thousand towns built yesterday from Kansas to California are the Confederate monument, the courthouse and the jail. Let us tear them down too and put up something covered with neon and radio amplifiers." William Faulkner, "To the Editor of the Oxford Eagle", (Oxford Eagle, 13 March 1947), as reported in Meriwether, Essays, 202.

The story can be read throughout as a denunciation of the North's failure to provide for the development of an infrastructure for the emancipated slave population of the South, and the generation of African-Americans born under the era of "Reconstruction", as represented by Nancy Manningoe, who attempts to earn her living by taking in washing and by prostitution. Nancy is plagued by economic deprivation, exploitation by white men, and the fear of reprisal from her former lover, Jesus.

Faulkner begins the story with an overview of Nancy's situation and the customs of the washing women of Negro Hollow. It is a pastoral image of Nancy's arduous, time-worn trek across the ditch and under the fence while balancing a bundle of clothes on her head. Quentin relates that "Sometimes the husbands of the washing women would fetch and deliver the clothes, but Jesus never did that for Nancy, even before Father told him to stay away from our house, even when Dilsey was sick and Nancy would come to cook for us" (392). When the children are sent to find Nancy, they do not go past the ditch, "because Father told us to not have anything to do with Jesus" (392). The ditch establishes a real and physical boundary between the black and white communities, reinforced by Nancy's (and Mr. Compson's) fear of Jesus.

On the third page of the story, Quentin relates that Nancy had been arrested for prostitution, and that she had been beaten by both Mr. Stovall, her white client, and by the jail keeper who found her hanging in her cell after she had attempted to commit suicide. Apart from Quentin's overview of "Negro Hollow", Nancy is the first character in the story to allude to the issue of race:

> "When you going to pay me, white man? When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since you paid me a cent --" Mr. Stovall knocked her down, but she kept on saying "When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since --" until Mr. Stovall kicked her in the mouth with his heel and the marshal caught Mr. Stovall back, and Nancy lying in the street, laughing. She turned her head and spat out some blood and teeth and said, "It's been three times now since he paid me a cent" (393).

Ironically, Jesus views Nancy's pregnancy as a violation of his rights, more than a violation of their intimacy:

> He said it was a watermelon that Nancy had under her dress.
>
> "It never come off of your vine, though" Nancy said. ...
>
> "I can cut down the vine it did come off of", Jesus said. ...
>
> "I can't hang around white man's kitchen", Jesus said. "But white man can hang around mine. White man can come in my house, but I can't stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I ain't got no house" (394).

Jesus' comment, "When white man want to come in my house, I ain't got no house" (394), indicates that Jesus has no inviolable right to property (which he extends to Nancy). In the pre-Civil War South, Nancy would have been the property of a white plantation owner, and Jesus would have had no say in the matter: in the post-Civil War era, Jesus still has no recognized, enforceable rights. For this reason, Jesus does not refer to a particular white man, but "white man" - a system of exploitation, under which he is still oppressed.

Once Faulkner has established the confrontational dynamic of Nancy's relationship with Jesus, the narrative returns to the Compson household:

> Dilsey was still sick in her cabin. Father told Jesus to stay off our place. Dilsey was still sick. It was a long time. We were in the library after supper. (394)

At one point, when Quentin is sent to enquire why Nancy has not left, he finds her alone in the kitchen. He asks "What is it?", to which Nancy responds "I ain't nothin but a nigger. It ain't none of my fault" (394). She is afraid of Jesus, but does not have to inform the family or Quentin of that fact directly, even though she had previously told Quentin that Jesus had left her and gone to Memphis. Mrs. Compson's reaction is dismissive: "Has she seen him?" (395). Mr. Compson, however, takes Nancy's fears seriously, since he accompanies her home, and, when she stays over at the Compson house, takes a pistol to investigate a disturbance in the kitchen. The implication and involvement of the children in these events reveals the lack of supervision in the household, but more importantly, signals a comparison between Nancy's vulnerability and that of a helpless, abandoned child.

When Mr. Compson suggests that Jesus probably already had a new "wife" in Memphis, Nancy responds with indignation (directed at Jesus, not Mr. Compson). The implication is that the common law relationship was as formal as someone of Nancy's station could expect. Her entire predicament would appear to be summarized by Mr. Compson's admonishment, "And if you would just leave white men alone" (396), to which Caddy replies, "Leave what white men alone?" ... "How leave them alone" (396). Mr. Compson has no response: there is no viable alternative for Nancy, and no one to protect or provide

for her. Even the bonds of maternity are suspect, since Aunt Rachel is ambiguous about her relationship to Jesus: "They said she was Jesus' mother. Sometimes she said she was and sometimes she said she wasn't any kin to Jesus" (396). The allusion to family ties is also testament to the legacy of slavery, since spouses and families were traditionally separated and uprooted. Faulkner allows the reader to infer that there was no foundation upon which the new South could transform itself in the post-Reconstruction period, and that both blacks and whites had been set adrift in the new social order without protection or direction.

Nancy's lament, "I ain't nothing but a nigger", is repeated three times: once to Quentin in the kitchen, when she sleeps on the pallet in the children's room, and when Mr. Compson and the children leave her at the end of the story: "I just done got tired", she said. "I just a nigger. It ain't no fault of mine" (410). It alludes to the fact that her freedom is illusory, with few economic or social options, and certainly, no protection from or mobility in white society. This response to her predicament exasperates and frustrates Mr. Compson, and parallels the inability of white society to help the black community surmount the challenges of the future any more than it can maintain order in its (the Compson) household.

The fact that Mr. Compson is willing to assist Nancy reveals the seriousness of the situation, even though there is nothing that Mr. Compson can do to protect her (and police protection is clearly out of the question.) Nancy's defiance of Mr. Stovall and Jesus is matched by the intensity of her fear and vulnerability. She believes that only by seeking refuge in Mr. Compson's house or by shielding herself with the children can she prevent Jesus from harming her. Her dilemma is facing Jesus without assistance from either the

black or white community: she refuses Dilsey's offer of help, saying, "Won't no nigger stop him" (400). Dilsey then asks Nancy, "What you going to do, then", as though Nancy still had a choice in the matter.

The children's discussion of fear and their taunting of one another, belies the real threat posed by Jesus. In addition, the children's repetition of racist terms reinforces Nancy's victimization and the children's indifference to her plight: when Jason asks her if she is a "nigger", she replies "I hellborn, child" (399). When he asks Dilsey if he is, Dilsey replies, "I reckon not". This apparently casual interaction and confirmation of racial distinction is followed by Dilsey's remark, "I don't reckon so" (400).

The distinction between the races is so ingrained in the psychological makeup of the South, that neither the Compson children nor Dilsey react to anything extraordinary in the exchanges between Jason, Dilsey and Nancy. The very fabric of this type of discourse is both shocking and familiar, and Faulkner has set up the story in such a way that we discover more about the society as a setting than we do about what is or is not actually going on between Nancy and Jesus. The very ambiguous and tenuous nature of Nancy's relationships with Jesus, Dilsey and others in her community, reinforces her isolation, as do her desperate entreaties to the children.

The discussions between Mr. and Mrs. Compson within the safety of the Compson household reveal the inability of white society (even those with a modicum of compassion) to grasp the enormity and scope of the problems of economic disparity and social displacement

in the black community. It is played out against the backdrop of a small southern community, with Mr. and Mrs. Compson representing opposing sides of the moral conundrum. Mr. Compson's concern for Nancy is juxtaposed against Mrs. Compson's complete indifference to the situation ("I can't have Negroes sleeping in the bedrooms" (400)) except insofar as it affects her immediate safety. When Mr. Compson walks Nancy home, Mrs. Compson admonishes him for leaving the children "unprotected with that Negro about" (395). Nancy's fear is repeatedly given credibility by Mr. Compson, particularly when Mrs. Compson asks him why he doesn't "do something about it":

> "Yet we pay taxes", Mother said. "I must wait here alone in this big house while you take a Negro woman home."
>
> "You know that I am not lying outside with a razor," Father said (401).

Mr. Compson's attempts to supervise his children, secure the safety of his household by ordering Jesus to stay away, and escorting Nancy to her cabin each night while Dilsey is sick, reveals his willingness to attempt to find a solution to the immediate problem. He has, however, no control over the world at large, and it is that uncertainty of the future which Jesus represents. Mr. Compson asks Nancy at the end of the story, "Then what do you want to do?" (408), which again underscores her helplessness. Nancy's predicament parallel's the enforced adaptability to the new social order by southern society, both black and white, while Mrs. Compson's self-interest and disdain echoes the indifference of corporate America alluded to in the opening passage.

Although Mr. Compson assures Caddy that nothing is going to happen, Quentin asks him "Who will do our washing now, Father?" (410). Clearly Quentin has grasped the seriousness of the situation and the sense of foreboding, represented by Jesus (who may or may not be waiting to attack Nancy) resonates in the final exchange between Caddy and Jason about who is the most afraid. Dilsey's questions and those of Mr. and Mrs. Compson, are attempts to find reason amid chaos, yet all they seem to be able to control is their own household, one that will eventually fall to disarray under Jason's supervision in The Sound and the Fury. Quentin's query suggests that he does not have confidence in his father's optimism, and fully expects that Nancy will not survive. Considering Quentin's eventual demise, this mood is appropriate to the larger pattern of Faulkner's work, and consistent with the tone of the opening passages and the narrative throughout.

The problem of the South, as evoked in this and Faulkner's later works, is that the legacy of slavery could not be overcome quickly. Faulkner seems to imply that the onslaught of the modern world of the twentieth century would only compound the problems facing the South unless there were an extended period of grace or adjustment (as he would later publicly plead to Negro leaders in "Go Slow Now"). As we shall see in Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!, the South of Faulkner's novels is caught between these two eras - what Sundquist calls The House Divided.

The pre- and post-Civil War eras were not so neatly divided, however, since generations grew up straddling both periods, and adhered in large part to the traditional roles established in the past. Miscegenation was the most powerful result of that changeover,

since it was no longer possible to distinguish between the races without the institution of slavery to determine who was black or white on the basis of racial lineage (not colour). What did not matter under slavery (one's lineage) became of the utmost significance to white society after the Civil War - the threat of miscegenation. Without the institutionalized classifications under slavery, the real fear was the impossibility of ascertaining anyone's true racial identity.

In many ways, "That Evening Sun" represents Faulkner's developing strategy of successfully presenting universal themes in the world of Yoknapatawpha, where he could maintain consistency in tone, setting, and characterization. This would prove most effective in Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!, where the issues under review become more complex, as do the narrative structures. The structural demands on the narrative are compounded by Faulkner's continual experimentation with the organization of material, and the apparent ambiguity towards the past and the issue of race on the part of the character-narrators in these novels.

Light in August

The issue of miscegenation is central to both Light in August and Absalom, Absalom!. It represents the perpetual threat to the South - the mixing of the races. In these two novels, Faulkner presents two white men, who are of mixed race; the one who significantly does not know who his father was; the other (perhaps more tragically), does.

Light in August is comprised of over twenty fully-developed characters who interconnect on the issues of sex, religion and race. The novel focuses on the division of Southern society by the colour line, depicting the isolation of those individuals most affected by racism and an attendant religious fanaticism. According to Sundquist, the narrative form of Light in August results from Faulkner's examination of the colour line in a broadening social context: "By embodying that problem in a character whose very physical and emotional self embodies the sexual violence of the racial conflict, Faulkner made the problem painfully visible and immediate" (90). The placement of different histories in staggered juxtaposition results in a sense of dislocation in time, which in turn illuminates the thematic parallels in the novels. For this reason, we initially have Lena Grove arriving on the outskirts of Jefferson. Her story frames the body of the text and is juxtaposed against the fanaticism embodied in the other characters. Unlike Lena's easy transition through sexual awareness, pregnancy and motherhood, Joe Christmas can never be accepted (sexually integrated) into either black or white society, and, because he cannot choose his race, he cannot merge with others and evolve. In every instance of social interaction in the novel, the

racial divisions of society must be upheld at all costs, and the cost, in Faulkner's view, is our basic humanity.

The conventional narrative texture of Light in August belies the dramatic depths to unfold, and the expected clarity of the third person stance is never realized: it is, however, effectively used to develop several plot lines, numerous shifts in time, and broader social and racial themes than previously depicted in The Sound and the Fury and in As I Lay Dying. Within this comparatively straight-forward structure, Faulkner continually arrests the chronological advancement of the plot in order to explore the internal world of the characters. He can do this with relative ease because each story (although inter-related at some point with the other plot lines) is told in extended passages which are more novellas than chapters.

Millgate maintains that in Light in August, "Faulkner still avoids simple chronological continuity and still deals...in large blocks of material so disposed as to achieve maximum effects of ironic juxtaposition or to bring to bear the fullest possible weight of historical, social, and emotional complexity upon a particular moment in time."[74] Faulkner achieves this effect mainly by using the extended flashback to inform and enrich the present-time action of the novel. Given the long flashback involving Joe Christmas, beginning at Chapter 6, it appears that the opening chapters dealing with Lena Grove, Lucas Burch (alias

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[74] Millgate, Patterns of Commitment, 186.

Joe Brown), Byron Bunch and Gail Hightower, serve as a framework for the central story of Joe Christmas.[75]

The mini-histories of major characters in Light in August are presented in the opening chapters, with the central story of Joe Christmas beginning in Chapter 6 and running to the end of Chapter 12; Chapter 13 describes the town's reaction to Joanna's murder; and in Chapter 14, Faulkner returns to Joe Christmas and provides, from pages 313 to 321, not so much a conclusion, as an insight into the psychological state of the man being pursued:

> He breathes deep and slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the neutral grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. "That was all I wanted", he thinks, in a quiet and slow amazement. "That was all, for thirty years. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years." (313)

The humanization of Joe Christmas in this type of passage suggests that white society's readiness to protect itself from the unknown and unfamiliar (i.e., strangers, Negroes) culminates in its unwillingness and inability to view Joe Christmas as anything other than "Negro". In his discussion of Calvinism in the novel, Berland maintains that "the terms black and white here refer not so much to race as to something within the individual, to the

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[75] "Here the past is central: individual freedom or compulsion is primarily determined by a character's success or failure in dealing with his past -in coming to terms with the spoken or, frequently, the inarticulate residue of what he has known, believed or done. And this past more or less determines his present" (Reed, 113).

antinomies of the Calvinist world" and imply a "double use of the same terms".[76] In this sense, it has been argued that in Joe Christmas, Faulkner presents "a man destined to break all the semiotic codes of society" as "a tragic mulatto; an American double-being".[77] He has, in fact, chosen to be both black and white, and to be neither.[78] Thadious Davis describes the racialization process as follows:

> Light in August does not delve into "Negro" consciousness of self as "Negro"; nor does it present Joe Christmas as a black man. Joe's characterization encompasses a level of abstraction and generalization which undermines his humanity, no matter whether he is black or white. Joe is almost purely a symbolic persona ... Sympathetic involvement with Joe as a person, a human being in trouble, is virtually impossible for most of the plot, so that certainly there is none with him as "Negro" toward the conclusion.[79]

It is only after Joanna's murder and immediately prior to Christmas' demise at the hands of Percy Grimm, that Faulkner fleshes out the dilemma of his character in its broadest, most universal, and most tragic terms. Christmas' alienation from society and ultimately from the woman with whom he shared the longest relationship, is intimated in our first

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[76] Alwyn Berland, "Light in August: The Calvinism of William Faulkner", Modern Fiction Studies 8 (1962): 159-170, 162.

[77] Snead, Faulkner and Race, 156.

[78] James A. Snead, Figures of Division: William Faulkner's Major Novels (New York: Methuen, 1986) 82-85, in his discussion of references to all things "Negro" in Light in August, argues that since Joe Christmas is a "white" mulatto, other markers of the racial division are used, such as references to the "Negro" part of town, a "Negro job", and "timeless Negro fashion", etc. (82-85).

[79] Davis, Faulkner's "Negro", 176.

introduction to him. He is originally presented by the third-person narrator through the point of view of the mill workers. This two-fold narrative perspective distances the character from us and lends credibility to the view of the workers:

> He was young. Byron watched him standing there looking at the men in sweatstained overalls. ..."We ought to run him through the planer", the foreman said. "Maybe that will take that look off his face." (27-28)

We are given second-hand evidence of the hostile reaction to Christmas' demeanour: the mill workers maintain that his is "a pretty risky look for a man to wear on his face in public" (28). The third-person narration underscores the suspicion: "He still had nothing to say to anyone, even after six months." (31) The implication is that his attitude, by its very lack of friendliness, is considered an affront by the workers, and results in their initial hostility towards him. They are, therefore, more than ready to believe Brown's later assertions that Christmas killed Joanna and that Christmas is part Negro.

The perspective of the town is a crucial element in the novel, serving almost as a single character, and it reflects the elusive nature of truth - what is known, and what is speculated, and how that perspective determines the actions and reactions of characters in the novel towards a central figure. The rigid over-simplification of attitude has a dehumanizing effect, and the toll in human compassion and understanding is evidenced by the harsh depiction of Joanna Burden by the trusted, and presumably neutral, Byron Bunch. Joanna Burden is described on page 42 and page 48 of the novel from two perspectives, that of the town:

> ...some of them know that Christmas and Brown both live in a cabin on the Burden place. But even these do not know if Miss Burden knows it or not, and if they did, they would not tell her. She lives in the big house alone, a woman of middleage. She has lived in the house since she was born, yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner whose people moved in from the North during Reconstruction. A Yankee, a lover of negroes, about whom in the town there is still talk of queer relations with negroes in the town and out of it, despite the fact that it is now sixty years since her grandfather and her brother were killed on the square by an exslaveowner over a question of negro votes in a state election. (42)

and that of Byron Bunch (as the story has been told to him by others):

> "It's a right big old house. It's been there a long time. Dont nobody live in it but one lady, by herself. I reckon there are folks in this town will call it a judgment on her, even now. She is a Yankee. Her folks come down here in the Reconstruction, to stir up the niggers. Two of them got killed doing it." (48)

Although Joanna was born in the South, she is considered "a Yankee" because of her father's sympathies for the plight of the Negro. At the suggestion that her murderer may have been part Negro, the town, in its quest for vengeance, accepted Joanna as one of its own. Percy Grimm later sets out to avenge the wrong done to "white women" (439), whom Joanna then represents. Thus, Joanna Burden has a two-fold and compounded thematic role - the indirect cause of her own murder by taunting Christmas with the same religious

fanaticism with which both had been oppressed, and the indirect cause of Christmas' death. In her personification of "victim" of the black race, she unwittingly (posthumously) assumed the role previously delegated to her by her father.

By pairing Joe with Joanna, Faulkner explores the very fundamental elements of racial hatred - a fear of black usurpation of white male sexual supremacy (as expressed by Percy Grimm). It was after Joanna's father declared that it was "a race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sins" that she perceived Negroes "not as a people but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived" (239). It is therefore appropriate that her relationship with Christmas deepens as her sexual desire for him diminishes and as his identification as Negro takes on greater significance.

Joanna's complicity in her own death becomes more apparent later in the novel, after we learn Joe Christmas's motive for killing her ("She ought not to have started praying over me" (99)), and after we are introduced to Simon McEachern and his brutal and unsuccessful attempts to convert his stepson to Christianity. When Joanna's sexual relationship with Joe ends, she tries to persuade him to attend a Negro college in the North. Joe had murdered his stepfather over the denial of his sexuality, and he murders Joanna ultimately for the same reason: the denial of his identity. As Kinney points out, "Joe envisions his problem as one of race, sin and sexual relations in a region where all three are necessary means of identification" (113). Christmas' story is a perpetual sorting out of that which he can never know - his racial heritage. This is precisely why he can never be accepted in a society which defines itself exclusively by the colour line.

The parallels between Joanna Burden and Simon McEachern become increasingly apparent throughout her attempt to convert Christmas[80], and she is described by Faulkner as being increasingly masculine in her relationship with Christmas. At this point, she has assumed McEachern's role of denying Christmas' sexuality and commanding him to adhere to her religious convictions. By defining Joe as Negro, both Joe and Joanna reinforce the identification with the value system in effect in the outside world, and internalize the racial conflict which insisted not only that he be Negro, but that he be socially, morally, and economically inferior to her: hence her attempt to send him to a Negro college. In this way, their private lives parallel society's rigid adherence to racial myths and Joe's identification with that myth.[81]

In an early passage in the novel, reference is made to Joanna's property where Joe has taken up residence as an ominous reference to their relationship:

> But it still lingers about her and about the place something dark and outlandish and threatening... But it is there, the descendants of both in their relationship to one another ghosts, with between them the phantom of the old spilled blood and the old honor and anger and fear. (42)

Before murdering Joanna, Joe visualizes the circular pattern of his life, and realizes his inability to change or alter the course of events that has been set in motion:

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[80] Melvin Backman, Faulkner: The Major Years: A Critical Study (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1966) 77-8: "To submit his will to her God would be tantamount to denying his whole life of resistance; whatever identity he possessed had been made out of his alienation and resistance. They both knew he would never yield."

[81] "The violence between them is inevitable, but significantly it is both impersonal and unimpassioned. Joanna's act of raising the pistol and Joe's use of the razor are both projected as shadows against the wall - phantom weapons directed at phantom opponents. For each sees embodied in the other that racial myth which has dominated their lives and which they must destroy if they are to free" (Vickery, 72).

> The dark was filled with voices, myriad, out of all time that he had known, as though all the past was a flat pattern, going on. He thought of that with quiet astonishment: going on, myriad, familiar, since all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be, since tomorrow to-be and had-been would be the same.(266)

It is society's adherence to the colour line - the distinction between, and segregation of, white and black society - that makes Joe Christmas' rebellion so poignant: his past does not permit firm identification within the social definition of black and white. Nonetheless, he repeatedly asserts that he has accepted the belief about his mixed racial heritage. Recalling the past, "he would stand in the kitchen door and look out across the dusk and see, perhaps with foreboding and premonition, the savage and lonely street which he had chosen of his own free will..." (243). Throughout the novel, Faulkner emphasizes the fact that the characters have rigidly upheld a religious myth or racial belief at the expense of their own humanity and compassion.

When Joanna suggests that Joe may not have Negro blood, he replies, "If I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time." (241) The implication is that he cannot undo the past which has, to this point, defined him. For this reason, he refuses her proposal of marriage on the grounds that "If I given in now I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be." (250) He has, however, chosen from the only two possibilities available to him and this underscores the desperate futility of his existence. Again, Faulkner does not suggest that Joe Christmas alone is responsible for his present social, physical or psychological predicament with Joanna: the novel explores how human beings evolve as composites of all incidents and events which have formed them, and the

way in which inherited myths prevail upon them and have a debilitating effect upon their lives.

The introduction of separate and distinct plot lines in this novel has thematic significance, and the narrative management reflects a consistent correlation between the intersection of these stories.[82] As an example, Reed notes that the fire at Joanna's house is presented before we know the nature of the crime:

> We are able to move through all this with comparative ease, in part because of the narrative landmark of the burning Burden house. It stands as a pillar in the centre of the book, and the remotest reaches into the deep, the intermediate, or the intermediate past are never far away from that mark. As with the house, all paths, figurative, narrative, and causal, lead there. (113)

The fact that Lena Grove arrives at the outskirts of Jefferson at the moment that Joanna's house is burning, juxtaposes the idyllic (albeit fecund and sexual) world of Lena Grove with the torrid sexuality of Joanna Burden's final years. We cannot appreciate this contrast fully until Joanna's story is revealed to us. In contrast to her female counterpart in the novel, Lena Grove is presented with a tragi-comic past, and a fundamental belief in "God's way" (in contrast to Mr. Burden's nihilism). Faulkner describes Lena with a tone of bemused admiration for both her naivete and her persistence: "Behind her the four weeks, the

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[82] "It was in Light in August that Faulkner first successfully found his way to a structure within which narratives kept essentially distinct and separate in plot terms could nonetheless be so deployed as to ensure their constant interaction -- each persistently modifying the other(s) in some way, generally with ironic or even parodic consequences" (Millgate, New Essays, 50).

evocation of far, is a peaceful corridor paved with unflagging and tranquil faith and people with kind and nameless faces...backrolling now behind her a long monotonous succession of peaceful and undeviating changes from day to dark and dark to day again..." (4).

At its most basic level, the story of Lena Grove is a testament to the possibility of civility and human decency within the most tragic (and in her case, comically pathetic) circumstances. Michael Millgate feels that, in contrast to the other characters, Lena does not appear to be as complex a character in that "she seems not so much a character in the book...as a kind of impersonalized catalytic force, effecting change but itself unchanging": "She provides a steady imperturbable groundnote, an onward linear progression that offers a constant contrast to the desperate contortions -moral, emotional and physical - of the other characters."[83] Yet Faulkner consistently thwarts the obvious interpretation, and, by presenting her character at the outset of the novel, offers a thematic context or framework for the other plots in the novel. We will recall this in contrast to the extreme reactions of characters to Joe Christmas, and the cloistered and unchanging lives of Byron Bunch, Gail Hightower and Joanna Burden in Jefferson.[84]

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[83] Millgate, Achievement, 125.

[84] "The opening chapter establishes, in fact, the prospect and promise of almost unlimited time and space - a suspension permissive of constant slippage between tenses, of the withholding of actions, and of the radical exploration and manipulation of time itself. That openness is, of course, exploited with great virtuosity throughout the remainder of the novel - especially in the extraordinary resourcefulness of its style and the subtlety of its shifts in time and narrative perspective" (Millgate, New Essays, 36).

In contrast to Lena's easy interaction with strangers (as evidenced in part by her predicament), Christmas is described as "listening" and "thinking", and always within the circular pattern of his life from which there appears to be no escape. Reed maintains that Faulkner uses italics for "thinking" in order not to sacrifice immediacy and that the "main aim of the verbal limitation is to get at the central fact of the character of Joe Christmas: he is ruled by inarticulate memory".[85] According to Kinney, however, this is part of Faulkner's "narrative consciousness", which does not "tell so much as intimate": "The choice of material, the angle from which it is seen, its inherent correlations and obvious juxtapositions with other observations it images -- these are the ways Faulkner uses visual thinking to help him transcend the limitations of language" (118). Clearly Joe Christmas is not meant to act as a spokesperson for either race, since he cannot know to which one he belongs. What he does convey is the dynamic intensity - as a child, an adolescent, and a young man - of an individual attempting to live his life in a society which is premised on an elusive racial distinction to which, through no fault of his own, he cannot comply. (This is reminiscent of Nancy Manningoe's lament: "It ain't no fault of mine": Faulkner is clearly intent on challenging the parameters within which we judge these characters.) The essence

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[85] Reed, 128. He asserts that the opening line of Chapter 6, "Memory believes before knowing remembers" is intended to invoke the theme of inarticulation: "This is not just an overt statement of this most effective narrative device but its organizing principle. Memory is inarticulate and can believe without formulating. Belief contains the sense of both a leap of faith and a false self-deception. The inarticulate operates before the articulate takes over, and can persist even when the articulate has taken over some of its function. *Before* gives memory not just chronological priority but primacy of incidence: it not only precedes the remembering of knowing in the child, but can also be dominant later, can cause knowing to be ineffectual ("longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders"). Memory can reach farther back in time than knowing, and can last longer -can outlast even knowing's failure to recollect, wondering why it does not" (128).

of Joe's dilemma is the result of the demands of society, not his own insistence of acceptance by either, and there is no satisfactory solution to his problem.

In this way, the third person narrative allows Faulkner to use his characters to their maximum representational effect, whereby each character embodies within the narrative a particular aspect of the predominant racial and social myths, and with it, a religious or philosophical attitude towards life. This, for Malcolm Bradbury demonstrates that "Faulkner's conviction that the modern lapse is temporary, that in human lives there are transcendent powers of endurance, that the curse may be lifted, that history, past or present, retains the potential for becoming myth."[86] Quite simply, Faulkner is delving into the layers of the past - from events immediately preceding the present action, to the social history of each character, particularly their early childhoods and the fanaticism of their forefathers. For this reason, the past histories are given in staggered progression, and, as Millgate asserts, at a point in the present action of the novel where the history will have the most dramatic impact.[87] For Millgate, this would explain why "...the extended flashback over the career of Joe Christmas is poised upon the moment immediately preceding his final confrontation with Joanna Burden."[88]

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[86] Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern American Novel (New York: Penguin Group, 1991) 120. He is referring to the following passage from Light in August: "Though the mules plod on in a steady unflagging hypnosis, the vehicle does not seem to progress..." (5).

[87] "Faulkner exercised a wholly new degree of structural freedom in composing Light in August, allowing each narrative sequence to expand according to its own inherent logic, introducing each new sequence and each new character at precisely the point required in order to throw the maximum illumination upon some nodal point in the action..." (Millgate, New Essays, 34).

[88] Millgate, New Essays, 34.

The determination to overcome one's limitations, and the ability to choose despite overwhelming circumstance, is Faulkner's focus in the novel. As the environment of the novel expands and the scope of the action encompasses another town, this theme resounds on a social and universal level as well.[89] He reinforces this throughout the novel by having his characters make decisions and act (or react) in response to a particular event (such as Lena's departure to find Brown).[90] The individual's participation in the decision-making process is crucial to understanding why Byron Bunch is so affected by the force of circumstance, and why he is compelled to take initiative in order to assist Lena, to challenge Brown, and to invent an alibi for Christmas. His moral counterpart is, of course, Percy Grimm, who also feels compelled to take matters into his own hands, for completely different ends.

When Lena arrives in Jefferson, Joanna Burden's house is burning. Thus, the most pivotal event of the novel has already occurred - Joanna has been murdered. In chapter 5, however, Christmas states, "Something is going to happen" (110). The importance here is not the past-time shift in the narrative, but the fact that he makes something definitive happen, and, unlike the way he had previously provoked men to fight with him and women to reject him because of his Negro blood, this time his action provokes the entire community. His choices are, however, clearly limited. Irving Howe believes that a common notion in Faulkner's novels is that "men are not free to choose their worlds and their selves, that past

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[89] "Because of the interpenetration and interdependence of the private and public worlds, each character is multidimensional. He is at once subject and object, observer and observed, creator and created" (Vickery, 66).

[90] Joe Christmas says "Something is going to happen to me" (110), and Gail Hightower says of Byron, "He has done something. He has taken a step" (294).

and present conspire to defeat the eager will..."[91], yet this is exactly what Faulkner wants to explore - the possibility of choice in human existence. The forces of the past may bear heavily upon the present condition of society, yet that is not Faulkner's answer to the problem of human existence in a difficult and challenging environment. In fact, he deliberately posits the most difficult aspects of any situation for maximum effect: beneath it all, there is always a moral choice to be made.

The illusion of progression in Lena's section contrasts with Christmas' location outside the world's activity.[92] He does not appear to participate in the world around him, except to the degree necessary to gain employment or food and shelter. However, as Vickery notes, "...no matter how isolated and impenetrable the private world of an individual, he still has a physical and social existence in the public world which makes its demands of him" (67). This is particularly true with respect to Christmas' developing relationship with Joanna Burden, and Byron Bunch's implication of Hightower in all of the present-time plot lines of the novel. It is significant that Byron and Lena should represent that element of progression which is missing in the lives of the other major characters, and that Byron's friendship with Hightower is crucial to the development, intersection, and resolution of the other plot lines in the novel. The structural and thematic importance of

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[91] Irving Howe, William Faulkner: A Critical Study (New York: Random House, 1951) 211-212.

[92] "As we know, Lena embodies the natural procreative realm from which Joe is alienated and Hightower has fled. What I want to emphasize is that the way in which Faulkner establishes Lena's alliance with the earth's motion is by suspending her sight of the wagon ("the eye loses it") as he pursues her hearing. In other words, it is by locating Lena from the start in the "realm of hearing" that he makes her embody time's ceaseless progression" (Porter, 237).

their friendship has not been fully examined in the criticism. Byron is a trusted witness to the demise of Hightower, whose sanity and moral decency can be gauged in his conversations, and by his reaction towards Byron, Lena and Joe, and in contrast to the fanaticism of Doc Hines. Faulkner takes particular care in describing Hightower with reference to the staleness of his clothing and abode, (as he does Joanna, and will later with Miss Rosa in Absalom, Absalom!) in order to emphasize the wasted life led by this character: "approaching, Byron thinks how the mute chair evocative of disuse and supineness and shabby remoteness from the world." (342)

In contrast to Christmas' agonizing journey, Hightower is described as a man "who for twentyfive [sic] years has been doing nothing at all between the time to wake and the time to sleep again." (383) While critics tend to pair the characters of Lena Grove and Joe Christmas, (and there are many contrasts and correlations in the text), the most dramatic juxtaposition is that of Joe Christmas and Hightower -- the one who challenged everyone and everything in a racialized society, and the other who refused to fight or flee, even when ordered to do so by the Ku Klux Klan. In addition, Hightower discovered a unique way (albeit an unsuccessful one) to incorporate his reverence for the past with the religious fanaticism of the South. This suspended state is safe, but ultimately unfulfilling, and, as a gauge of the isolationism of the South, Faulkner seems to suggest that one way or another the South must adapt to the modern world.

Faulkner presents each of his characters in the novel with a past or background from which they do not evolve. Reed maintains further that "No past in this book is safely sealed

off from the present" (114).[93] Faulkner reinforces this theme by focusing the narrative on Hightower in Chapters 3 and 4, and in Chapter 20, after the murder of Joe Christmas. Millgate maintains that Hightower's introspection is "an essential element in Faulkner's self-conscious attempt to universalize the themes of the novel"[94], whereby the preoccupations of Yoknapatawpha echo those of the entire South. This would appear to be true of every thematic parallel between the story of Joe Christmas and that of Gail Hightower,[95] both of whom attempt to function and exist outside society. Hightower is similarly described from the town's point of view, with sordid tales and speculations about his past, although little of what is believed by the town is in fact true. Ultimately, however, neither Christmas nor Hightower can resist the human compulsion towards social interaction, Joe with Joanna, and Hightower with Byron. Their human need for communication attests to their tragic inability to surmount social stigma and judgment, and Faulkner deliberately makes each both a victim and a perpetrator of his own alienation.

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[93] In his discussion of the shifts in time in the novel, Reed maintains: "If the alternation of tense were arranged systematically around the arbitrary locus of the column of smoke from the Burden house, for instance, the story might be narrated in the present as it advanced from that point and in the imperfect for events leading up to the that point. Instead we find that shifts between present and imperfect (in Chapters 1, 2, 14, and 18) are from the very outset almost completely arbitrary. [Once we adjust]...we begin to get the idea that there is little difference between them: that pasts tend to persist in the present; that a past which has risen to the surface of the present several times becomes a stronger past and tends to convert a future might be into must be; that recurrence is a pattern in which...it's the same all the way forward and all the way back" (Reed, 116).

[94] Millgate, New Essays, 39.

[95] "Through Joanna Burden and Gail Hightower that identification is given historical perspective, not only because they themselves are conscious of the historical origins of the particular myths which dominate Joe Christmas and themselves alike, but because they have virtually stopped living in the public world where their beliefs might be modified by further interaction" (Vickery, 74-75).

Gail Hightower, like Joanna and Joe, has chosen to live as a recluse within the community: "I have bought my ghost, even though I did pay for it with my life." (464) (Ironically, Joe Christmas, by his violent acts, will force the town to react definitively towards him, and he, too, will pay with his life.) As a result of the circumstances of Hightower's personal life (his wife's suicide, his expulsion from the pulpit), it has been easier to withdraw and absolve himself of all responsibility to the living world.[96] It would appear that Hightower does redeem himself by delivering Lena's baby and, in the final moments, attempting to intervene on behalf of Christmas. He can only maintain this "purposeful momentum", however, by coming to terms with the past and acknowledging the myth of his grandfather's Civil War escapades. He does this in Chapter 20, after Joe Christmas has been murdered. In this way, Hightower serves as an allegory of each individual's potential to come to terms with the destructive effects of passive compliance of any sort in the face of a falsely glorified past and the perpetuation of racial intolerance and injustice.

It is through Byron Bunch that Hightower is thrust into the mainstream of events surrounding Lena Grove and Joe Christmas, and the purpose of Lena's encounter with Byron is not only to compel him into the world of personal inter-relationships, but to extend the plot to include Hightower's redemption. It is out of his concern for Lena that Byron attempts to stop Brown. The significance of his action is that he does act and interact in the physical and social world. After he is knocked out by Brown, he awakens on the railway

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[96] Millgate maintains that the perception of Hightower as a shadow figure "may result from a failure to distinguish Hightower's function from Faulkner's deliberate characterization of him as a non-participant, a man withdrawn from life and its sufferings" (Achievement, 130).

tracks to the sound of the whistle: "This rouses him; this is the world and time too." (416). Byron (like Lena) is now firmly established in the world of present-time participation and action.

The return to the complacent tone of the saleman's narrative at the end of the novel provides a symmetry to the novel, with Lena and her baby providing the life-affirming contrast to all that has taken place in the novel. It does not, however, either diminish or negate the impact of either the tragedy of Christmas' life and death, or the resolution of Hightower's final vision.[97] By ending the novel in the first-person narrative of the "neutral spokesman", and focusing on Byron and Lena, the final chapter contrasts the hidden agony and despair of Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas, who lived out their private passions and desperate lives on the outskirts of society. In this way, Faulkner provides a sense of partial closure to the novel, as he did in The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying. The resolution in Light in August, is, however, illusory, since his principal focus is the parallel of the inner turmoil of the major characters and the racial turmoil of the South. Faulkner would continue this focus in Absalom, Absalom! -- while not as commercially or critically successful as Light in August, certainly the most ambitious undertaking, thematically and structurally, of his entire body of work.

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[97] As Warren Beck notes: "Faulkner's studied use of a full style and his sense of its place in the archetectronics of an extended and affecting narrative is well displayed in the last chapters of Light in August, chapter nineteen closing with the first climax, Joe Christmas' death...chapter twenty...Hightower's final vision; and then chapter twenty-one which completes the book, furnishing a modulation of detached calm through the simple prosaic, somewhat humorous account, by a new and neutral spokesman, of the exodus of Lena and Byron into Tennessee" (Faulkner, 36).

Absalom, Absalom!

Absalom, Absalom! was published in 1936, four years after Light in August.[98] In the opening passages of The Hamlet (which Faulkner copyrighted in 1931, but Random House published only in 1940), Frenchman's Bend is described as a "tremendous pre-Civil War plantation" where "all that remained of [the Frenchman] was the river bed which his slaves had straightened for almost ten miles to keep his land from flooding, and the skeleton of the tremendous house..." (1). The land, "parcelled out now into small shiftless mortgaged farms" contrasts the straightened river bottom - the enforced order of the old South. In this and numerous other passages in his novels, Faulkner evokes some aspect of the pre-Civil War era that was irretrievably lost, having been purchased at too high a cost in human suffering.

The novel encompasses the entire nineteenth century history of the South, from Thomas Sutpen's youth, his journey to the Caribbean (significantly, Haiti, the first nation of black slaves to successfully overthrow its white "owners"), his establishment in Jefferson, his role in the Civil War, and its tragic aftermath. The novel proper, however, is set in 1910 when Quentin Compson and his roommate reconstruct the story. What Faulkner sets out to

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[98] According to David Paul Ragan, the inception of Absalom, Absalom! was the short story "Wash" (which appeared in 1933, featuring Wash Jones and Thomas Sutpen); he believes that Faulkner later devised the formula of framing the narrative with the character of Quentin Compson's character: "Faulkner may have had clearly in mind the anguish and despair of Quentin Compson and thereby arrived at the narrative strategy which would add so much to the Sutpen legends." David Paul Ragan, William Faulkner's "Absalom, Absalom!": A Critical Study (Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1987) 8. Moreland also suggests that Faulkner was intent on capitalizing on Quentin's bitterness before his suicide (which we know to have occurred in The Sound and the Fury) (26).

do in this novel is to "Tell about the South" as Shreve requests, but on a Southerner's terms, and employing the narrative methodology developed in his earlier novels. He uses five narrative voices, but with numerous shifts in narrative perspective, including the town's perspective in the speculative conjectures of Miss Rosa. In her role as the moral vanguard in a private war with Sutpen, her narrative also establishes suspicion about Sutpen's moral character and his responsibility for her family's ruin, and, by implication, the destruction of the South. It is fitting that, however unrepentant she may be, Miss Rosa should ask Quentin at the outset, "Is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose?" (20).

Expanding upon the success of Light in August, Faulkner extended his experimentation with narrative time-shifts and presented the story of Thomas Sutpen in the middle of Absalom, Absalom!, again after the climax of the novel -- Henry Sutpen's murder of Charles Bon at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred. The story of Thomas Sutpen is initially told from the perspectives of Miss Rosa Coldfield and Mr. Compson, with the reconstruction of the entire saga by Quentin and Shreve beginning in Chapter 6. Sutpen's version of his early history is contained in Chapter 7, and is interrupted by the resumption of the present-time reconstruction of past events by Quentin and Shreve. Once again, the disclosure of events and the placement of extended flashback sections within the text has rhetorical significance.[99] Indeed, what becomes clear in Absalom, Absalom! is the similarity of narrative strategy employed in The Sound and the Fury and Light in August - almost a

[99] "The placement of the narrations in a sequence of cumulative revelations is supplemented by more familiar suspense-building devices. Accomplished action precedes cause throughout. In Chapters I through VI, Sutpen appears as heroic, demonic, purposive and inscrutable; Chapter VII first presents him as the baffled, limited and compulsive mortal that he is" (Lind, 897).

conglomeration of technique. Again, the lack of resolution, once the entire story has been reconstructed by Quentin and Shreve is a deliberate, integral part of the narrative, throwing all thematic weight and significance behind what is not resolved in the novel.[100]

The struggle which Quentin Compson has in confronting his past parallels the South's inability to evolve - to relinquish its mythical past glory, and to adapt to the demands of the twentieth century. In this way, history and the historical process, are central to the novel and Quentin's dilemma is carrying the burden of that past into the future, as he is personified by Faulkner as a "barracks filled with stubborn backlooking ghosts" (12). In his article, "Race, History and Technique in Absalom, Absalom!, Frederick Karl describes the numerous "crosscurrents of relationships" among the offspring of Thomas Sutpen, and how race emerges as the "tragic ingredient" in the Sutpen saga.[101] Karl believes that "while such a momentous question as race is affected by Faulkner's sense of history, it is even more by his method of presenting that history with particular narrative strategies" (113).

The first-person narrations of the novel are considered by Millgate to be "monologues", which, when interrupted, "permitted interior and exterior views of a character

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[100] "By this time [Chapter 6], Quentin knows all he ever will about Sutpen and his family, though the reader has a great deal to learn. The final four chapters reveal what -- to Quentin at least -- are the clues which explain Henry's murder of Bon, which Quentin sees as the seminal event in the Sutpen tragedy" (Ragan, 87).

[101] Frederick R. Karl, "Race, History, and Technique in Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner and Race: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1986, Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, eds., (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1987) 209-221, 212-213.

to be much more closely juxtaposed and virtually indeed, to coexist.[102] In this way, the narrative management in Absalom, Absalom! shares its rhetorical force and effect with the character/narrators of the novel.[103] Millgate asserts that Faulkner's awareness of the effect of the first-person narrator/auditor in the last chapter of Light in August accounts for the "organizing principle" found in Absalom, Absalom!: "the first-person narrative, with all its advantages of immediacy and character revelation, need not be treated in isolation...but could be handled in terms of extended dialogue."[104] Indeed, notwithstanding the significance of the first-person segments, the entire story of Thomas Sutpen and his children is disclosed in the third-person narration in the first three chapters of the novel, until Mr. Compson's narration takes over at the end of Chapter 3. Miss Rosa's narration takes over again in at Chapter 5, and ends with her suggestion that "something" (apart from Clytie) is living at the Sutpen mansion.

The presentation of Miss Rosa at the beginning of the novel, establishes the dramatic context, either by contrast, parallel or juxtaposition, in which the plot and attendant themes evolve. The first chapter, narrated in the third-person, focuses on the meeting between Miss Rosa and Quentin, and her sister's marriage to Sutpen and her own "engagement" to him

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[102] Millgate, Patterns of Commitment, 187.

[103] Lind describes the process as follows: "When the reader first encounters Sutpen and his kin, he suspects a distortion in the manner of Miss Rosa's presentation of the story, but he cannot measure its degree because he knows as yet so little about her. As the legend grows through the narrators' successive contributions, his capacity to estimate the various degrees of distortion increases. However, such is the ordering of the narrative that the magnification of events occurs always in advance of an understanding of the distortions which cause it. The reader is consequently affected sensibly before he can react intellectually" (890-891).

[104] Millgate, Patterns of Commitment, 187.

(18). This narrative perspective qualifies our first view of Miss Rosa: "...the quaint, stiffly formal request which was actually a summons...he did not recognize as revealing a character cold, implacable, and even ruthless. (10) Miss Rosa summons Quentin on the pretext of wanting to tell the story so that he might write it and have it published. ("Only she dont mean that, he thought. Because she wants it told." (10)) Her mission is twofold: to convey her version of events and for him to accompany her to Sutpen's Hundred.

Much attention has been given to Miss Rosa's frequent qualifications of her version and interpretation of people and events.[105] As Gerald Prince has noted, these intrusions "referring to the narrator or the quality of his narration may lead us to conclude that the real subject of the narrative is the rendering of certain events rather than the events themselves...".[106] Miss Rosa's emotionally-charged narrative in Chapters 1 and 5 perfectly complements the drama of the story to unfold:

> ... and nobody there but the daughter who was already the same as a widow without every having been a bride and was, three years later, to be a widow sure enough without having been anything at all, and the son who repudiated the very roof under which he had been born and to which he would return but once more before disappearing for good, and that as a murderer and almost a fratricide...(15)

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[105] "Nothing which is told or conjectured by the narrators, however distorted, is without thematic relevance. Since their projections are determined by their own psychological and social past, and since the Sutpen story throws additional light upon that past, the meaning of what they tell reflects at least doubly and must be read throughout for its multiple import" (Lind, 901).

[106] Gerald Prince, Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1982) 13.

> I saw Judith's marriage forbidden without rhyme or reason or shadow of excuse...I saw Henry repudiate his home and birth right and then return and practically fling the bloody corpse of his sister's sweetheart at the hem of her wedding gown...(18)

Rosa's description of events is not inaccurate, but there is no contextual reference with which to gauge the veracity of her version. Indeed, her ignorance of crucial and salient facts is juxtaposed with the grandiose indignation of her narrative discourse. This does not mean that she is an "unreliable" narrator, as critics have suggested, but rather, that the metaphoric value of her character and narration of events has greater thematic significance than merely recounting events. She is both the town's wary and hostile reporter, and the scorned "bride-to-be": her narrative authority is, therefore, suspect. What her narrative does convey, is something that the central characters do not, since Henry, Judith, and Bon are given so little narrative voice - an emotional intensity and reaction to Bon's death, the central tragedy of the novel for Judith, Henry and Quentin.

Rosa's narrative sections allude to three key situations: Henry's murder of Bon, her confrontation with Clytie (which will be repeated at the end of the novel), and Sutpen's proposal to her (which foreshadows his dismissal of Wash's granddaughter). I can think of no more energetic and passionate account of the story than that of a Southern spinster who has been insulted by an indecent proposal forty-three years before by a man whose legend looms larger than life. Indeed, Miss Rosa's hatred and loathing of Sutpen structurally parallels the indignation of the first Mrs. Sutpen, Charles Bon's mother, after twenty-eight

years of plotting revenge, as imagined by Quentin and Shreve at page 303. Miss Rosa provides enough doubt about Sutpen's moral character, that we are inclined to anticipate a link between the tragedy of Bon's death and the earlier aspersions cast upon Sutpen's character.

The third person narrative takes over in Chapter 2 ("It was a summer of wisteria") to relate the Sutpen story, from his arrival in Jefferson, to his return with his slaves and a French architect. Mr. Compson assumes the narration to describe Sutpen's second departure and return to Jefferson, and ultimately, his marriage to Ellen Coldfield. In contrast to Miss Rosa, Mr. Compson's narration is almost cold and impartial, yet he neatly parallels Shreve's detached stance later in the novel beginning in Chapter 6, while Quentin mirrors the emotionalism of Miss Rosa. In addition, Mr. Compson's laconic tone is an essential counterbalance to the depth of the tragedy to unfold. In Chapter 3, he is responsible for the narrative of events from 1864 until Sutpen's return in 1866, and to summarize Miss Rosa's background in a more rational, tempered tone. It is, however, the description of Charles Bon, which is pivotal to Mr. Compson's narration:

> -- a young man of a worldly elegance and assurance beyond his years, handsome, apparently wealthy and with for background the shadowy figure of a legal guardian rather than any parents -- a personage who in the remote Mississippi of that time must have appeared almost phoenix-like, fullsprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time ... -- a man with an ease of manner and a swaggering gallant air in comparison with

> which Sutpen's pompous arrogance was clumsy bluff and Henry actually a hobble-de-hoy. Miss Rosa never say him; this was a picture, an image. (74)

As early as Chapter 8, we learn that Sutpen has told Henry that Bon is his brother (293) and that Bon had known this all along. This results in Henry's initial repudiation of his family and birthright. It is only when Sutpen informs him further that Bon's mother had been part Negro (355) that Henry is compelled to stop Bon from marrying Judith. Bon's response, "So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear" (356), qualifies our previous perception of him from Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson's perspective. In spite (or because) of Sutpen's refusal to acknowledge him, Bon refuses to renounce his intention to marry Judith and forces Henry to act.[107]

The genesis of Sutpen's design arises from an incident in his early childhood (at approximately 12 years of age, the same age at which Charles Etienne Bon arrives at Sutpen's Hundred). The incident is recounted over ten pages (229 to 239) and establishes Sutpen's motive for success -- vengeance against the injustice of being a poor, uneducated white boy, who was refused admission to the plantation owner's house by a slave. Sutpen

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[107] Ironically, Bon's son, Charles Etienne St-Valery Bon not only renounces his claim to the Sutpen legacy, but insists on being accepted as black. Like Joe Christmas, he taunts others who believe that he is white; in a final act of defiance against Judith, he marries an illiterate Negro woman and lives in a shack on Sutpen Hundred with his son, Jim Bond. Lind has noted: "Charles Etienne Bon, whose spiritual rebellion is signalized in his establishment at Sutpen's Hundred of an anthropoid wife and in his rampages of uninhibited inebriation, reenacts his father's symbolic gestures with greater vehemence, in response to the more sustained physic and social pressure which he has had to endure. Raised as white but self-identified as Negro, he treads that special path to Gethsemane which is reserved for the Joe Christmases of this world" (904).

recounted his life story to General Compson, and in Chapter VII, Quentin relates it to Shreve, introducing the theme of "innocence":

> So he didn't even know there was a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own, and where a certain few men not only had the power of life and death and sale over others, but they had living human men to perform the endless repetitive personal offices... (221-222)

He concludes this passage with the words, "So he had hardly heard of such a world until he fell into it." (222) Sutpen then recounts to General Compson how he rejected his first wife (Bon's mother) because she was "unsuitable" to his design. We only learn at page 355 that she it was because she was part Negro (as therefore, was Bon). In this way, Sutpen's "innocence" is posited against the tragic outcome of his design - the demise of all of his offspring.

In his review of Absalom, Absalom!, Cleanth Brooks aptly sums up the way in which Faulkner's narrative management of material match the depth of intensity of his subject matter:

> Absalom, Absalom! is in many respect the most brilliantly written of all Faulkner's novels, whether one considers its writing line by line and paragraph by paragraph, or its structure, in which we are moved up from one suspended note to a higher suspended note and on up further still to an almost

> intolerable climax. The intensity of the book is a function of the structure. ... There are actually few instances in modern fiction of a more perfect adaptation of form to matter and of an intricacy that justifies itself at every point through the significance and intensity which it makes possible.[108]

In fact, rarely in Faulkner's novels is an image or event conveyed but once: scenes involving separate characters often share a structural similarity and thematic purpose which resonate throughout the text. An example are scenes of confrontation in Absalom, Absalom!: Henry Sutpen's confrontation with Charles Bon at page 33: "Dont you pass the shadow of this post, this branch Charles." The scene (not the exchange) is repeatedly referred to throughout the novel and occurs just prior to Henry's murder of Charles Bon, his half-brother.

Similarly, Clytie Sutpen confronts Miss Rosa at page 138 (after Henry has killed Bon), with the words, "Dont you go up there, Rosa", and again at page 369 when Miss Rosa returns to Sutpen's Hundred with Quentin Compson in 1920. In both scenes, Clytie must maintain her position of authority (as Henry and Judith's half-sister) in opposition to their aunt, a white woman. From Miss Rosa's perspective, being addressed in so familiar a manner by someone she considers inferior is the ultimate insult:

> Then she touched me, and then I did stop dead. ... with a shocking impact too soon and too quick to be mere amazement and outrage at that black arresting and untimorous hand on my white woman's flesh. Because there is something

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[108] Cleanth Brooks, "History and the Sense of the Tragic: Absalom, Absalom!", Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays, Robert Penn Warren, ed., (Princeton, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1966): 186-203, 203.

> in the touch of flesh with flesh... But let flesh touch with flesh, and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too. (139)

the scene ending in Rosa's thunderstruck denunciation: "Take your hand off me, nigger!" (140) This, notwithstanding the fact that the woman were the same age and had grown up together, and that in the moment of the confrontation, Rosa realized that Clytie was also Sutpen's child. Faulkner will use the confrontation again in depicting Clytie barring Rosa from the stairs in 1920 only this time Rosa strikes her to the ground (369). The impact of the scene is just as dramatic and compelling as the first, except that the racial barriers are clearly established by that one, brazen line which is not repeated. The irony is that Bon, whose image Miss Rosa clearly adored, was also the mixed-race offspring of Sutpen.

Furthermore, the most crucial events of the novel are described before we can understand the significance of what has occurred, and this is evocative of the way in which Shreve McCaslin wants Quentin to "tell about the South", before Shreve has the contextual background and understanding with which assess it. In the following exchange between Shreve and Quentin at the end of Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner describes the Southern experience was a continuum, a living history:

> "Because it's something my people haven't got. Or if we have got it, it all happened long ago across the water and so now there aint anything to look at every day to remind us of it. We dont live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves... What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at

> and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? a kind of entailed birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, so that forevermore as long as your childrens' children produce children you wont be anything but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett's charge at Manassas?"
>
> "Gettysburg," Quentin said. "You cant understand it. You would have to be born there." (361).

History to the white Southerner is both a birthright and a burden, and in Faulkner's novels it is clear that that legacy was entrusted to a writer with no small measure of compassion, and above all else, a willingness to bare a tormented soul. He does so through Quentin's interaction with Shreve - an eager, albeit naive, interloper.

Since the entire Sutpen saga is recounted by Quentin to and with his roommate Shreve, Faulkner manages with his narrative strategy to convey the many layers of history at work in the novel, and the impact on Quentin as he relates what he has clearly not yet absorbed (and is unwilling to accept) about this particular story.[109] The theme of the presentness of the past is represented by Quentin's responsibility for hearing the story from

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[109] "Critics who have tried to explain the structure of the story in terms of any one pattern have failed to understand its real complexity, and most of them have failed to discover its principal theme. Faulkner himself appears to have forgotten it by the time of the Virginia interviews. But the text, if I read it at all correctly, shows that the heart in conflict with itself is that of Quentin." Richard Adams, Faulkner: Myth and Motion, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) 181.

Miss Rosa, his father, and recounting his grandfather's stories to Shreve.[110] The fact that Quentin is unable, in 1910, to come to terms with the racial division in his country serves as testimony to the burden borne by the new South, which he represents. Indeed, Sundquist believes that in this novel, Faulkner's purpose was to fully address the "single most agonizing experience of his region and his nation: the crisis and long aftermath of American slavery" (6).

It is significant that in an early passage of Absalom, Absalom!, at Page 11, in which the saga of Thomas Sutpen is summarized, there is no mention of the fact that the issue over which Henry Sutpen "widowed" his sister was race:

> It was part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man Sutpen; 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 when he first rode into town out of no discernible past and acquired his land no one knew how and built his house, his mansion, apparently out of nothing and married Ellen Coldfield and begot his two children - the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride - and so accomplished his allotted course to its violent (Miss Coldfield at least would have said, just) end. (11)

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[110] Porter asserts: "Quentin comes to us as an auditor who is forced to listen to Rosa Coldfield, to his father, to his roommate, but who tries to resist a narrative pull which threatens to engulf him. By remaining the passive hearer, Quentin tries to secure a detached perspective on the story of Sutpen, and so to free himself from the burden of history.." (243).

This was the story as Quentin Compson then knew it, and Faulkner deliberately emphasizes the tragedy of Sutpen's children in this passage in order to prepare us for the introduction of Charles Bon at Page 67. As early as page 11, Bon is a central figure, and his elusiveness in the narrative has ramifications to all other characters throughout the rest of the novel: because the initial description is through Miss Rosa's limited perspective, reference to his character continually implies that there is much more to the story than we are told, and that he is the clue to the Sutpen tragedy. Although we learn that Henry's motive for killing Bon was Bon's mixed racial lineage, the existence of his mulatto mistress and child is initially presented as the reason for Henry's ultimatum, "Do you renounce?", at Page 132.[111] This reinforces the issue of race and keeps it in the forefront until Bon's true identity is revealed later in the novel. This is what Quentin cannot accept: "He (Quentin) couldn't pass that" (172). Frederick Karl has noted the way in which "race rises out of the shadows", and because it is part of Sutpen's past, "it brings Charles Bon into the family not only as a future member but as the racial 'other half'".[112] Bon, as much as Rosa or Henry, links past and present, not only Sutpen's past to his second family, but the Sutpen legacy to Quentin. As Millgate notes:

> The implication for Quentin himself is clearly that those traditions and genealogies by which Southern families set such store - and not the least the

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[111] As early as page 96, Mr. Compson tells Quentin that although Henry loved Bon, Mr. Compson believes that Henry could not have acted otherwise: "Henry was the provincial, the clown almost, given to instinctive and violent action... Because he never thought. He felt, and acted immediately." Although Mr. Compson believed then that Henry's motive had been to compel Bon to renounce his marriage to the woman in New Orleans, this and other passages establishes an impulsiveness in Henry, which will eventually outweigh Bon's wisdom and experience.

[112] Karl, Faulkner and Race, 210-211.

> Compson family itself - were ultimately lacking either in substance or in value. What Quentin also learns is that the fatal flaw in Sutpen's design was precisely that flaw of man's inhumanity to man inherent in the recent history and structure of the South, a flaw represented not only by slavery itself but by other and surviving forms of racial and social intolerance.[113]

While Absalom, Absalom! has been viewed as an historical novel, Cleanth Brooks maintains that, "Absalom, Absalom! is a persuasive commentary upon the thesis that much of 'history' is really a kind of imaginative construction" (311), and Richard Adams finds that it is "not so much historiographical as mythical".[114] Indeed, Faulkner presents Sutpen (initially through Miss Rosa) as a demonic character in order to elevate him to mythic proportions: this type of rhetoric aptly parallels the epic proportions to which the past of the South had been "glorified", and Faulkner disparages that audacity of vision with the words, "Be Sutpen's Hundred".

The information set out in the first five chapters of the novel is reconstructed again in the final chapters beginning at Chapter 6 (except for the flashback to Sutpen's pre-Jefferson history in Chapter 7, as recounted to General Compson). This flashback provides the first clue to the identity of Charles Bon; it is only in retelling the story to Shreve that

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[113] Millgate, Achievement, 157-158.

[114] Richard P. Adams, Faulkner: Myth and Motion, (Princeton: U of Princeton P, 1968) 180.

Quentin can face the implications and ramifications of Henry's attempt to protect his sister (from the threat of both incest and miscegenation which Bon represents).[115]

There is no conclusion or resolution which will satisfy the quest for the truth either about Thomas Sutpen or about the South,[116] and Faulkner makes it clear that there will be no satisfactory ending, but rather a "day when the South would realize that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage" (260). Clearly, to Faulkner, the South's tenuous hold on social propriety was been usurped by economic greed and the exploitation of blacks by whites under slavery. As Lind maintains:

> Through the reciprocal interplay of narrators and the story they tell, the issues created by racial subordination are considered in many aspects and driven home through the working out of numerous parallels and recapitulations. For purposes of analysis, two coordinate levels of the theme may be differentiated: the problem of blood as it figures in the Sutpen tragedy, and the issue of slavery as it affected the history of the South. (901)

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[115] Ragan claims that "Concern with Bon in Chapter 7 is limited to how he would have been viewed by Sutpen, who dominates the telling almost exclusively. The placement of Sutpen's background so late in the novel is a brilliant structural gambit..." (106-7), but surely this is no less so than beginning the flashback of Joe Christmas at Chapter 6 in Light in August.

[116] Wagner states that while many critics have noted the errors and discrepancies, the dilemma of the story tellers "becomes the structure of the entire book: four people bent on re-creating what they cannot possibly ever "know", the complete Sutpen story" (9).

In his discussion of "Control of Clarity and Confusion", Wayne C. Booth concludes that, "The claim that there is no answer is itself an answer, so far as literary effect is concerned."[117] Indeed, as Walter Slatoff maintains, the irresolution is part of the rhetorical structure of the novel.[118] Similarly, Vickery has argued that the qualifications and alternatives of the sentences in Miss Rosa's section reflect the novel's entire structure.[119] By using stylized characters in extended first-person narratives, Faulkner could intersperse qualifications without breaking the textual surface of the novel, and have the present time narration cease in order to maintain the suspension of resolution throughout the entire novel.[120]

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[117] Booth, 285-286.

[118] "It has been generally recognized that the purpose of some of Faulkner's structural complexities is to keep his material in a state of flux or suspension. But it has also generally been thought and argued or assumed that these suspensions are finally resolved, that by the ends of the novels the jig-saw picture puzzle integers do fall into place. There is much evidence, I think, that Faulkner is willing and even anxious to leave most of them in a high degree of suspension, or at least a suspension that cannot be resolved in logical or rational terms. Nor has it been recognized how very much his moment to moment presentation of experience involves a juxtaposition of elements which do not seem to fit together and which to some degree resist synthesis or resolution." Walter J. Slatoff, "The Edge of Order: The Pattern of Faulkner's Rhetoric", William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery, eds. (Michigan: Michigan State UP, 1960) 173-198, 174.

[119] "The qualities evident in Miss Rosa's description of a single incident are also found in the style as a whole. Whoever the speaker, the long sentences bristle with qualifications and alternatives beneath which the syntax is almost lost. And what is true of the sentence is true also of the paragraph, of the chapter, indeed of the total structure" (Vickery, 86).

[120] "In each narrative in Absalom, Absalom! we see the speaker's attempts to deal with the potential opposition within his tale to his own interpretation: Miss Rosa's demonic view of Sutpen must consider the possibility of his humanity; Mr. Compson's sense of human folly and meaninglessness must cope with Charles Bon's apparent altruism in dying for love and honor; Quentin and Shreve's idealistic approach to Bon must contend with his possible exploitation of Judith as a means of getting even with his 'father', Sutpen. Strategy demands as much tension as the teller's own version of truth will allow" (Kartiganer, 72).

It would appear that Faulkner's main focus or concern is the very way in which events are judged, recorded, and passed on from one generation to the next. What we see in Absalom, Absalom! is a slice of the historical process, the mythologizing and de-mythologizing at one and the same time, beginning with the high rhetoric of Miss Rosa's recounting of events, to Quentin and Shreve's fantastical recreations of events and situations to fill in or explain what no one (living) knew. As such, the novel is an examination of the very nature and notion of history - something which has deeply affected the South.[121]

We realize at the end of the novel that it was the discovery of Henry's motive (race) that compelled Quentin to reconstruct the past with Shreve, perhaps in the hope of formulating an alternative conclusion. The issue of race degrades Henry's action, and the implication for Quentin is that man's respectability is lost when codes of honour are demeaned in this way.[122] For Sutpen, Southern tradition was a calculated formula, "an assortment of things to be possessed, not a manner of living that embodies certain values and determines men's conduct".[123] This, Quentin cannot accept, and in the course of the novel, he attempts to renounce Sutpen's legacy and reclaim his history and his past.

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[121] According to Karl, "what we are claiming is that race has been absorbed into technique. But the matter is even more complicated, for Faulkner has also absorbed race into history, and into a particular view of history. History, in this respect, becomes part of technique; it is "created history", process more than fact. Race lies in there, in the creative process itself" (Faulkner and Race, 210).

[122] "At its core, the novel focuses on attitudes toward race which themselves determine the outcome of the book. ... "...so that to extrapolate race we must extract virtually the entire metaphorical meaning of the novel" (Karl, Faulkner and Race, 209-210).

[123] Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1962) 298.

Conclusion

William Faulkner happened to have been a southerner, intent on writing about the South, and he happened to have chosen his profession and to compose his most magnificent early novels thirty years before the explosive civil rights movement in the United States began to focus the nation's attention on the plight of African-Americans, particularly in the South. It was a movement that compelled the United States and the world community to acknowledge the fundamental principles of human rights. Faulkner, who died in 1962, was at the forefront of the issues of his time, having paved the way for the American literary community to focus on and address the legacy of slavery and the issue of race.

Unfortunately, Faulkner criticism focused on his stylistic innovations, rather than the reason for those structures and how they served the themes under review -the racialization of the South and American society. I have suggested that since the novels derive their thematic import from the form of the novels, we should begin at the level of structure in order to arrive at theme and meaning, and that while Faulkner's major themes are fundamental staples, they are as complex as his texts. His greatest novels were written during a creative period unmatched by any other Southern writer of his time. His creative genius combined with a treasure trove of stories, images, and ideas from a dense historical background. His stylistic innovations were, however, tempered and controlled by a deliberate, careful approach to his narrative poetics.

The structures of Light in August and Absalom, Absalom! enhance and support the themes and subjects under review -- the legacy of slavery in the South of the twentieth century. In each novel, Faulkner qualifies and modifies each "fact", so that no final or satisfactory resolution is possible. Each character holds a vital clue to that legacy, and to the duality of its history and contradictions. The conglomeration of narrative elements affect the way in which we interpret these novels and finally, affect the thematic import they convey.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, nothing in Faulkner's narrative is without rhetorical significance - no fact, statement or idea without its counterpart, thematic contrast, parallel or juxtaposition. The concordances and correspondences abound: every image, character and event has a modifier and qualifier to be found somewhere in the novel. I have attempted to demonstrate that the structural innovations employed by Faulkner were consistent with the presentation of juxtaposed characters and themes, and that the one dominant theme brought forth in these two major novels is the issue of race and the legacy of slavery, by the examination of those histories and myths associated with it.

I would agree with Eric Sundquist that in these novels, Faulkner addressed those issues of Southern society which needed to be addressed, and that he did so with an urgency and poignancy which remains unmatched. His creative genius elevated his subjects and themes to a level of world focus and attention where they rightfully remain to this day.

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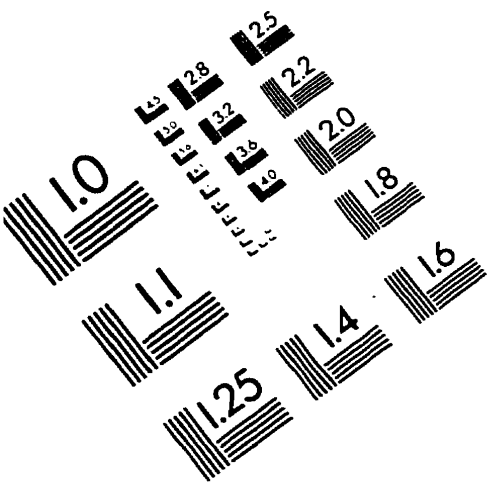

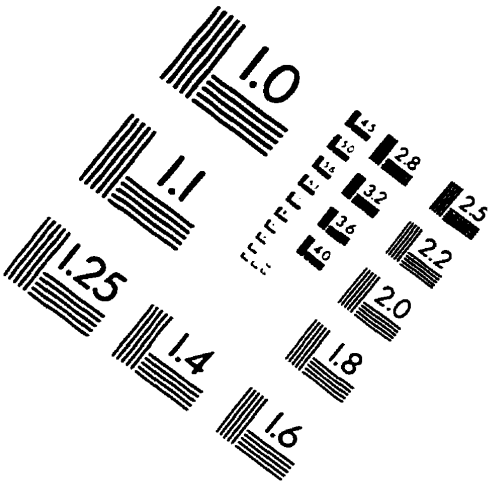

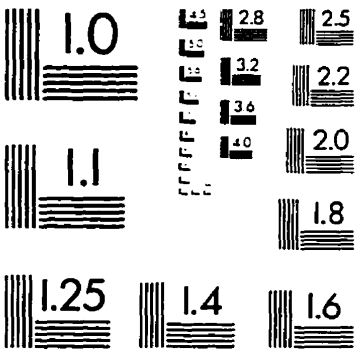

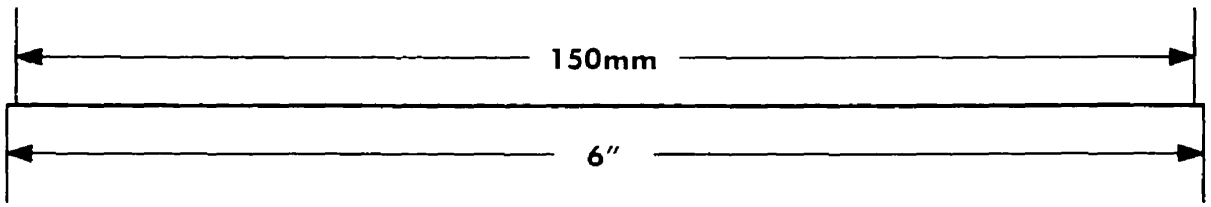

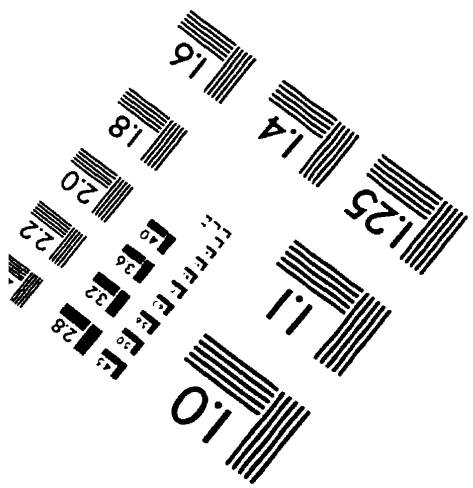

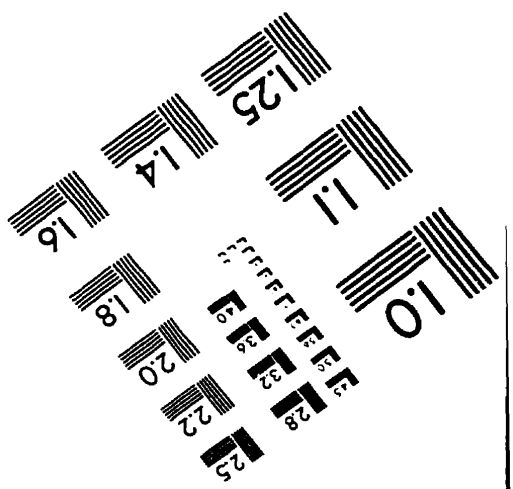

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