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## Brothers and Sisters in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*

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## THE CARL AND WINIFRED LEE HONORS COLLEGE

### CERTIFICATE OF ORAL EXAMINATION

Stephanie M. Kellogg, having been admitted to the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College in Fall 2000 successfully presented the Lee Honors College Thesis on April 21, 2004.

The title of the paper is:

"Brothers and Sisters in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!"

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Friesner", written over a horizontal line.

Mr. Scott Friesner, English

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Martell", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. John Martell, LHC

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Smith", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Greg Smith, English

Brothers and Sisters in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*

Stephanie M. Kellogg

Honors Thesis

Principal Advisor: Scott Friesner

April 21, 2004

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A note on the abbreviations used in this paper:

*Absalom, Absalom!:* (AA)

*Faulkner in the University:* (FU)

*The Sound and the Fury:* (SF)

“I’m trying primarily to tell a story, in the most effective way I can think of, the most moving, the most exhaustive. [ . . . ] I am telling the same story over and over, which is myself and the world.”  
(*Selected Letters* 185)

“*Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished.*”  
(*AA* 210)

### **Reading Faulkner, Reading Quentin**

In first reading *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, I soon came to realize how important it is to study the two novels in conjunction with one another. Although I read *The Sound and the Fury* first, after finishing *Absalom, Absalom!*, the books became inextricably linked. I also came to discover that Faulkner creates an unusual situation for his audience: while *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) certainly stands on its own, readers reach a much fuller understanding after reading *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), so that, in brief, to interpret *The Sound and the Fury*, readers must also interpret *Absalom, Absalom!*, just as knowing *The Sound and the Fury* is essential to any understanding of *Absalom, Absalom!*. Quentin Compson, as both narrator and character, provides the essential link between the two works.

Fascinated by his suicide, I knew that Quentin would be a focal point throughout my project. Immediately, I realized that Quentin’s relationship with his sister, Caddy, was significant. After getting more involved with my work, I discovered the attention Faulkner devotes to brother and sister relationships. While most Faulkner criticism focuses on the brother-sister relationships of Caddy and her three brothers in *The Sound and the Fury*, as we shall see, a close reading shows that Quentin has an “extended family” of many brothers and sisters. Moreover, while all readers acknowledge the links

between *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, more often than not critics tend to discuss the works as discrete units. When focusing solely on Caddy and her brothers, or on the love triangle of Henry, Bon, and Judith, the reader disserves and obscures the intricate web of relationships interwoven between these two novels.

By positioning Shreve McCannon as a non-Southern narrator, Faulkner allows readers from all backgrounds to reconstruct the Yoknapatawpha story of Thomas Sutpen and Quentin Compson. Faulkner knew full well that many of his readers would not be Southerners, so Shreve permits the reader to feel welcome and invited into Southern society. As Shreve's relationship with Quentin develops, so does the reader's. Faulkner indicates Shreve's importance as a narrator: "Shreve was the commentator that held the thing to something of reality. If Quentin had been left alone to tell it, it would have become completely unreal. It had to have a solvent to keep it real, keep it believable, creditable, otherwise it would have vanished into smoke and fury" (*FU* 75). Yet Shreve, in his detachment from the South, is but one type of narrator; the Sutpen story is an altogether different matter for Quentin, who comes to discover that he is implicated within the tale of Sutpen's dynasty. Ultimately, we reach a deeper understanding of Quentin's suicide and our fullest grasp of Sutpen's design in the "happy marriage of speaking and hearing" between Quentin and Shreve (*AA* 253). Through the narrative tellings and retellings, the reader comes to experience and to understand the fluidity and fluctuation of time and all of its components. By focusing on the brother-sister relationships that flow freely between the two novels, connected by the tragic character, narrator, and brother, Quentin Compson, the reader can see the prevalence of these brother-sister relationships spanning generations and bloodlines while undergoing

countless metamorphoses and substitutions, demonstrating the interchangeability of people and the repetition of events throughout time.

Faulkner overtly draws on Shakespeare's great tragedy, *Macbeth*, not only with the title of *The Sound and the Fury* (about which Faulkner declared: "the more I had to work on the book, the more elastic the title became, until it covered the whole family," and one might add that it covered both novels as well (*FU* 87)), but with the themes that run through both it and *Absalom, Absalom!*. Characters who try to escape time, such as Quentin Compson and Thomas Sutpen, remain truly tragic, while those who accept time endure. "[T]here's not too fine a distinction between humor and tragedy, that even tragedy is in a way walking a tightrope between the ridiculous—between the bizarre and the terrible. [ . . . ] [the writer is] still trying to write about people, to write about man, about the human heart in some moving way" (*FU* 39). Faulkner writes tragic novels in order to convey his thoughts on mankind. Looking at Macbeth's soliloquy in Act 5 Scene 5, the reader immediately sees many parallels between the play and these two novels:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
 To the last syllable of recorded time;  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle,  
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale



Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing. (18-27)

Faulkner's readers can readily envision Quentin as the speaker and Macbeth's soliloquy suddenly comes to represent his life's contemplations. The repetition of "tomorrow" creates an inescapable and droning effect similar to how Quentin must feel about time in relation to his impending "dusty death," while the "walking shadow" alludes to Quentin's obsession with drowning his own shadow. While Benjy's narrative seems to draw from "a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury," Quentin's narrative as well can be explained using this soliloquy in that he, too, has a powerful story to tell in his own convoluted way. Quentin "struts and frets" his time until he drowns himself, "And then is heard no more."

*The Sound and the Fury* ostensibly refers to Macbeth's speech, but the reader cannot overlook the similar deliberate references to Macbeth's soliloquy in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Sutpen desires to leave his mark on the world, not just waste his time on earth to be "heard no more," and tries to establish a dynasty that will live on. Similar to Macbeth, Sutpen stops at nothing to accomplish his goals, even when he destroys his own family. Mr. Compson explicitly describes Sutpen as hearing " 'all the voices, the murmuring of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow beyond the immediate fury,' " and Rosa, too, pointedly describes Sutpen: "*He was a walking shadow*" (AA 232, 139). Macbeth will stop at nothing to obtain the crown just as Sutpen stops at nothing in order to create his dynasty. The reiteration of "tomorrow" again signifies the perpetual aspect of time which draws Sutpen's existence on earth closer to an end and jeopardizes his likelihood to succeed in his design. Macbeth's tragic ambitions, then, as well as his

anxious contempt for time, provide another important framework for an interpretation of both novels.

### **Dreading Time**

“ ‘time is longer than any distance.’ ”

(*AA* 201)

Quentin Compson, born to Jason and Caroline Compson in 1891, commits suicide by drowning himself in a river in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on June 2, 1910. After his parents sell the pasture that Benjy, his fifteen-year-old idiot brother, plays on in order to send Quentin to college, he attends Harvard for one year prior to his suicide. Before attending Harvard, however, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin learns about the doomed Sutpen family through a story narrated by his father and Rosa Coldfield, and after arriving in Cambridge, retells the Sutpen story with his Canadian roommate in college, Shreve McCannon. Quentin has a younger sister, Caddy, and two younger brothers, Jason and Benjy; his father suffers from alcoholism and his mother from hypochondria. Yet, as we shall see, through hearing and retelling the saga of Thomas Sutpen's family, Quentin comes to find new relations, and within this “extended family,” new brothers and sisters in Henry and Bon, and Rosa and Judith.

Quentin struggles with three main things: his sister Caddy, time, and death. Quentin, who often thinks of committing incest with Caddy, cannot control himself when he knows that he must lose her to other men. Caddy marries Herbert Head on April 25, 1910, and Quentin commits suicide less than two months later. In the Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury* (1945), Faulkner details that Quentin “loved not his sister's body but

some concept of Compson honor,” suggesting that Quentin strives to preserve Compson honor while realizing that his family is doomed (*Portable* 709). While Faulkner’s detailed Compson genealogy in the Appendix uses the word “doom” in many passages to describe each character’s downfall or failure, the honor that Quentin wishes to defend remains unapparent to the reader as well as to Quentin because of Faulkner’s ambiguous description. Quentin wishes to uphold the honor that the rest of his family has already lost, hence the doom that befalls them. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the story of Thomas Sutpen especially enthralls him because Sutpen, “the idea of a man,” in Faulkner’s words, “who wanted sons and got sons who destroyed him,” tries to accomplish the seemingly unattainable dynasty for his family (*FU* 73). Perhaps especially because Sutpen falls to his doom, the endeavor captivates Quentin: “He grieved and regretted the passing of an order the dispossessor of which he was not tough enough to withstand. But more he grieved the fact (because he hated and feared the portentous symptom) that a man like Sutpen, who to Quentin was trash, origin-less, could not only have dreamed so high but have had the force and strength to have failed so grandly” (*Selected Letters* 185). John T. Irwin, in his study *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge*, describes Sutpen’s quest in expressly psychoanalytic terms:

When Sutpen returns from the Civil War to find his one son dead and the other gone, he starts over a third time in his design to found a dynasty, to get the son who will inherit his land and thereby prove, through his dependence, that Sutpen has succeeded in his quest to be the son who seized the power of the father and

then, as the father, kept that power from being seized by his own son in turn. (106)

Sutpen's attempt to obtain irrevocable power fascinates Quentin who, even though he does not have any children, remains in the power of his father. Irwin emphasizes this Oedipal desire to overtake the father because "Mr. Compson is Quentin's most subtle enemy in *The Sound and the Fury*" (75). Quentin clearly feels a sense of satisfaction and authority when he tells his father many important details about the Sutpens that his father never knew, just as in *The Sound and the Fury* when he dons the seemingly superior role over his father in an attempt to avenge Caddy's honor.

Although he wishes never to be separated from Caddy and begs her not to go through with the wedding, she does not accept the offer and thus marries Herbert, leading to Quentin's suicide. On the day of his suicide he imagines "Jesus and Saint Francis talking about his sister. Because if it were just to hell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us" which illustrates Quentin's tragic thoughts of how to save his sister and himself by escaping into their own private hell (*SF* 50-51). Knowing that heaven is unattainable, Quentin wishes for them to have an excuse to remain isolated in hell together; he attempts this flight to hell by fantasizing about telling his father that they have committed incest: "I said I have committed incest, Father I said" (*SF* 49). Echoing Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Quentin desires to "finish" all of his problems with one violent action. Near the beginning of the play, *Macbeth* states:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
 It were done quickly. If th'assassination  
 Could trammel up the consequence and catch  
 With his surcease, success, that but this blow  
 Might be the be-all and the end-all –here,  
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
 We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases,  
 We still have judgment here that we but teach  
 Bloody instructions, which being taught, return  
 To plague th'inventor. This even-handed justice  
 Commends th'ingredients of our poisoned chalice  
 To our own lips. (1.7.1-12)

Wishing for “the be-all and the end-all” solution to his dilemmas, Quentin tries to threaten his father with the possibility of incest, which does not work because his father would not believe him. He also attempts to murder Caddy and then kill himself while they are sitting by the riverside, but Quentin cannot bring himself to carry out the act and drops his knife. Quentin finally succeeds when he commits suicide by drowning himself in a river: “this even-handed justice / Commends th'ingredients of our poisoned chalice / To our own lips.” Death becomes the final termination of Quentin's travails.

Subsequently, Macbeth's words apply to Sutpen as well who uses “Bloody instructions, which being taught, return / To plague th'inventor.” Through his ruthless attempt to produce a son in order to establish his dynasty, similar to the plight of the childless

Macbeth, Sutpen falls to his doom when the sons he succeeds in creating turn against one another and obstruct his “vaulting ambition.”

Prior to “the be-all and the end-all” of his suicide, Quentin’s father gives him his grandfather’s watch and says: “I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it” (*SF* 48). Mr. Compson also offers Quentin his nihilistic views of the world: “Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you’d think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said” (*SF* 66). For Mr. Compson, a man is only what his travails have made him and he will never escape them. His declaration that “time is your misfortune,” relates specifically to Quentin, who wishes to escape time and all of its constraints. The reader, through the ominous sound of the bells tolling, knows the conclusion of Quentin’s life: “The last note sounded. At last it stopped vibrating and the darkness was still again” (*SF* 113). Quentin may have overcome time because now he is dead and is no longer living within the constructs of time, but time still remains on earth and cannot be stopped.

Quentin battles with his grandfather’s watch until he breaks it and bends the hands off: “I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on” (*SF* 51). Even though Quentin attempts to “conquer” time and with his “surcease, success,” he will never be victorious because time remains, “to the last syllable of recorded time,” insurmountable. “The watch ticked on” insinuates that no one escapes time, even man-made time, which seems less overbearing than other perceptions of time because it remains a contrivance of men. And as Faulkner

painstakingly reveals in his portraits of Quentin's interior life, at the psychological level, Quentin, left holding the broken pieces, seeks to make sense of the fragments.

Quentin experiences psychological time, as Faulkner notes in both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, through shifts in italicized words, by retreating to his memory and recalling fragments of events which then return and permeate his present state of mind. Inevitably ranging within and between both novels, the reader constantly moves simultaneously backwards and forwards with Quentin as he/she constantly learns new information and thus progresses ahead in the narrative while concurrently anticipating Quentin's suicide and receding into Quentin's past along with him. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin's memories range from Damuddy's death and Caddy's marriage to his numerous conversations with his father. As memories have no respect for clock time, they freely move between years, events, and people following no chronological order. Although pervasive in Benjy's section, this notion can be found in Quentin's section as well. However, time in Benjy's section is experienced much differently than in Quentin's. Blurring the distinction between past and present, Benjy's narrative shifts between many different events with key words triggering each memory:

“Let him tell.” Caddy said. “I dont give a cuss. Carry  
Maury up the hill, Versh.” Versh squatted and I got on his back.

*See you all at the show tonight, Luster said. Come on,  
here. We got to find that quarter.*

“If we go slow, it'll be dark when we get there.” Quentin  
said.

“I’m not going slow.” Caddy said. We went up the hill, but Quentin didn’t come. He was down at the branch when we got to where we could smell the pigs. They were grunting and snuffing in the trough in the corner. Jason came behind us, with his hands in his pockets. Roskus was milking the cow in the barn door.

*The cows came jumping out of the barn.*

“Go on.” T.P. said. “Holler again. I am going to holler myself. Whooeey.” Quentin kicked T.P. again. He kicked T.P. into the trough where the pigs ate and T.P. lay there. (13)

In this section, Benjy’s thoughts flow from before his name-change to the present day to Damuddy’s funeral to Caddy’s wedding without any recognition of the change in time. In his essay, “Concepts of Time in *The Sound and the Fury*,” Perrin Lowrey declares that “[to] speak of Ben’s concept of time is in reality a contradiction, for Ben cannot conceive of time. For him, time does not exist. He is not conscious of the passing of time, nor of the continuity of events; he lives in a world where past is indistinguishable from present” (54). Quentin remains acutely aware of the past and the present and these memories haunt him so much as to lead to his suicide in order to escape them. As Lowrey also points out, “Ben approaches, quite ironically, that timeless state which Quentin, in his section, struggles so hard to achieve” (55). Only Quentin’s idiot brother approaches the escape of time and he does so unknowingly, whereas Quentin desperately seeks to find a way to evade time and finds only suicide as the means to escape. Timelessness unites Quentin and Benjy and casts Benjy into the role of a shadow of Quentin’s character. Benjy seems to be the id-like component to Quentin’s psyche, reacting to stimuli only



through emotional responses. Benjy also shares a desire for his sister, though not incestuous:

[ . . . ] we stopped in the hall and Caddy knelt and put her arms around me and her cold bright face against mine. She smelled like trees.

“You’re not a poor baby. Are you. Are you. You’ve got your Caddy. Haven’t you got your Caddy.” (SF 6)

Caddy assumes a motherly role for Benjy by taking care of him and protecting him from outside threats, such as Jason. Quentin and Benjy look to Caddy as their source of strength and happiness; both desire her full attention. Through these similarities, Benjy fulfills the role of a shadowy other self for Quentin.

Shadows haunt Quentin’s psyche throughout *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. In Jungian psychology, a shadow often refers to one’s secret self, a dark, distorted yet mirrored and mirroring self. In the opening passage of Quentin’s section in *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin reveals one of these numerous references to shadows, marking time by the shadow that appears on his window. Quentin again notes what time it is but now refers to his own shadow: “The chimes began as I stepped on my shadow, but it was the quarter hour” and Quentin knows that “[i]n superstition, if you step on your own shadow, you will die” (SF 61). This reference, as well as other subsequent indications to stepping on his shadow, reinforces the reader’s knowledge that Quentin wishes wholly for death. He later refers to shadows by saying “I walked upon my shadow, tramping it into the dappled shade of trees again” (SF 76). Quentin uses the image of trees and their shadows to accentuate his own shadow. By watching the shadow

of a tree, one can see the changing position of the sun, and thus, the progression of the day to Quentin's suicide.

Quentin seeks to slay this alternate self by drowning his shadow: "my shadow leaning flat upon the water, so easily had I tricked it that would not quit me. At least fifty feet it was, and if I only had something to blot it into the water, holding it until it was drowned, the shadow of the package like two shoes wrapped up lying on the water" (*SF* 57). Then Quentin states: "Niggers say a drowned man's shadow was watching for him in the water all the time" (*SF* 57). Quentin chooses an African American adage to describe his situation, which alludes to the fact that a shadow is "black," as well as regarded as "the other," yet simultaneously of the self. Yet this black, shadowy other also intimates Quentin's fascination with the story of the Sutpens and the love triangle of Henry, Judith, and Bon. By the connection between Henry and Bon as half-brothers, one sees that they mirror each other. Relating to both Henry and Bon and their situation with their sister, Quentin also comes to see his dark, shadowy self through Bon, the dark or Black son. *Absalom, Absalom!* contains many blatant references to Bon as shadowy, such as when Mr. Compson describes him in relation to the father who has denied him: "Bon with that sardonic and surprised distaste which seems to have been the ordinary manifestation of the impenetrable and shadowy character. Yes, shadowy: a myth, a phantom: something which they engendered and created whole themselves; some effluvium of Sutpen blood and character, as though as a man he did not exist at all" (*AA* 82). Bon, a "manifestation" of the shadowy Sutpen, remains an obscure figure, much like Quentin's secret self remains unclear to himself.

These references to the shadowy self find both emphasis and explanation in John T. Irwin's, *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge*. Within Irwin's theory of doubling and repetition, the reader further grasps how *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are necessarily linked and inseparable. Both novels have a similar plot ultimately linked to Quentin, who provides the driving narrative force for each one. The reader learns of the doomed Compson family, which in turn is linked to the doomed Sutpen family; mutual friendship links the Sutpens to the Compsons, so that the reader can predict that the downfall of one will be the downfall of the other. Both novels deal with models of the Oedipal triangle as well as the downfall of two families. The love triangle of Henry, Bon, and Judith combined with the triangle of Quentin as brother seducer, Quentin as brother avenger, and Caddy clearly demonstrates the theory of both doubling and repetition. Quentin relives and reconstructs the story of Thomas Sutpen's demise, while ultimately concerning himself with the love triangle of Henry, Bon, and Judith, because he observes the similarity to his life. As he "sees" Henry kill Bon to save Judith, Quentin uses that instance as an example of why he needs to destroy the brother seducer as well.

Irwin clearly demonstrates that Quentin's suicide can be understood in terms of Freudian psychology, where the beginning of Quentin's psychological disturbance lies within the Oedipal triangle in which Quentin desires his mother but cannot have her because of the powerful father who poses the threat of castration. In Quentin's case, Caddy becomes the symbol of the mother figure (as noted earlier with respect to Benjy) that he desires, and thus he fears his father's power over him. However, within this basic Freudian triangle, many deviations and substitutions occur. Quentin tries to avenge

Caddy's honor against her lover instead of his father. This lover could be one of her many lovers, such as Dalton Ames, or could be seen as the part of Quentin that desires his sister. Mr. Compson becomes passive and does not try to save Caddy's honor and thus reverses the father-son roles between Quentin and himself.

Another version of this Oedipal triangle consists of the two sides of Quentin: the brother seducer and the brother avenger. In this triangle, the conflict consists in the two personalities of one being. Quentin struggles with himself in order to maintain Caddy's honor, while Quentin's only seeming option remains suicide. By committing suicide, he avenges his sister's honor and does not allow the brother seducer to have Caddy and yet, simultaneously, he also allows the brother seducer to have her in death by uniting himself with the water. The river, or water in general, becomes analogous to the pool that Narcissus gazed into. Hence, when Quentin and Caddy are children and he sees Caddy lying on her back in the river, he sees not only his sister, but also a reflection of himself. He then merges the self-love, like Narcissus, with the love of his sister. "Quentin's drowning of his shadow, then, is not only the punishment, upon which his own person, of the brother seducer by the brother avenger, it is as well the union of the brother seducer with the sister, the union of Quentin's shadow with his mirror image in the water, the mirror image of himself that evokes his sister lying on her back in the stream" (Irwin 43). Seeing this resemblance, Quentin realizes that, through drowning himself, he can fulfill both the desires of the brother seducer as well as the brother avenger.

Quentin has always been a prisoner of time, as shown in a passage of his days in school counting down the minutes until he could leave:

I wouldn't begin counting until the clock struck three. Then I would begin, counting to sixty and folding down one finger and thinking of the other fourteen fingers waiting to be folded down, or thirteen or twelve or eight or seven, until all of a sudden I'd realise silence and the unwinking minds, and I'd say "Ma'am?" "Your name is Quentin, isn't it?" Miss Laura would say. Then more silence and the cruel unwinking minds and hands jerking into the silence. "Tell Quentin who discovered the Mississippi River, Henry." "DeSoto." Then the minds would go away, and after a while I'd be afraid I had gotten behind and I'd count fast and fold down another finger, then I'd be afraid I was going too fast and I'd slow up, then I'd get afraid and count fast again. So I never could come out even with the bell, and the released surging of feet moving already, feeling earth in the scuffed floor, and the day like a pane of glass struck a light, sharp blow, and my insides would move, sitting still. (*SF* 56)

Even as a young child, Quentin struggles with clock time in wishing for the school day to conclude. His teacher, Miss Laura, sarcastically questions his identity by asking him " 'Your name is Quentin, isn't it?' " demonstrating that Quentin toils with his sense of self as well. Quentin desires to "come out even with the bell," but since he cannot, he resorts to suicide in order to end time. The reader also comes to understand that Mr. Compson oftentimes provides Quentin with many quips and remarks that focus on time, indicating one source of Quentin's obsession: "Father said clocks slay time. He said

time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life” (*SF* 54). Mr. Compson refers to an idea that man made clocks but did not make time; hence real time, or time that has “come to life,” remains free from the control of man. Quentin does not seem to accept this notion; clock time continues to plague Quentin, who becomes intent on escaping and thus killing time, revealing why he breaks his grandfather’s watch.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, time confronts Quentin in many aspects on the day he plans to commit suicide and immediately, Faulkner signals to the reader that Quentin’s section of the novel will focus largely on the experience of time: “When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch” (*SF* 48). Assuming that he has just awoken, the reader sees how Quentin suffers from time even as his morning commences. Waking from an unconscious sleep, Quentin plunges into the consciousness of being “in time again.” Lowrey provides a similar explanation, stating: “It is important to see just what Quentin means when he says, ‘and then I was in time again.’ Quentin wants to get outside of time; he thinks of sleep as a temporary getting outside of it, and he thinks of death as a permanent getting outside of it” (55). For Quentin, faced with Caddy’s impending marriage, filtered through the story of Henry, Bon, and Judith, the inevitability and inescapability of time evolves into Quentin’s demise.

The opening scenes of Quentin’s section not only link shadows and time, they also initiate the unavoidable sound of a ticking clock. Reminiscent of Quentin’s attempt to “come out even with the bell” during school, subsequent scenes usually have a chiming clock in the background as a reminder that time never stops and remains

omnipresent. Hunger pains also remind Quentin of what time it is during the day: “[e]ating the business of eating inside of you space too space and time confused Stomach saying noon brain saying eat oclock” (*SF* 67). This discomfort marks a different way for Quentin to experience time. Lowrey offers an explanation for Quentin’s suicide and avoidance of learning what time it is on the day of his suicide:

He has decided that one way to get outside of time is to kill himself, and he has set a time for his suicide. But if he can manage in some way to *forget* time before the appointed hour, everything will be all right. Unless he does manage to forget time, time will keep moving forward inexorably, the appointed hour of his death will arrive, and he will have to kill himself in order to forget time. This is the reason for Quentin’s struggle, throughout his section, against finding out what time it is. (55-56)

Lowrey’s description explains why Quentin breaks his grandfather’s watch on the day of his planned suicide and why he also asks the jeweler if any of the clocks in the store window are correct but does not want to know the time. Knowing the time would defeat Quentin’s effort to forget time; if Quentin can forget and escape time, he will miss the arranged time of his suicide and will be free from the pressures of being “in time.” Quentin tries to experience “stop time” but, since no one can truly reach this stasis, he must live in the fluctuation of time. Similarly, no one can forget time due to recurring memories of the past as well as time’s perpetuity. Yet, facing the tragic tales of both the Sutpens and his own family, Quentin can but confront his seeming impotence; the saga of

Sutpen compounds Quentin's sense of doom as he discovers, in his affiliation with Henry and Bon, his present within their past, which only serves to accelerate his dread of time.

### Brothers

*"Yes, there should, there must, be love and faith: these left with us by fathers, husbands, sweethearts, brothers, who carried the pride and the hope of peace in honor's vanguard as they did the flags; there must be these, else what do men fight for? what else worth dying for? Yes, dying not for honor's empty sake, nor pride nor even peace, but for that love and faith they left behind."*

(AA 120)

Quentin experiences the fluidity of time throughout his narrative in *The Sound and the Fury* as well as in the retellings of Sutpen's story in *Absalom, Absalom!*.

Quentin, like the reader, travels freely between memories of the past and events of the present. Similar to this transposable relationship of time, Quentin also encounters the interchangeability of people and their relationships with each other, especially as he and Shreve reconstruct the story of the Sutpens. Throughout the tellings, Quentin imagines Henry, Bon, Shreve, and himself as the "[f]our of them there, in that room in New Orleans in 1860, just as in a sense there were four of them here in this tomblike room in Massachusetts in 1910" (AA 268). While Shreve narrates the story, Quentin sees him as like his father: "Yes, almost exactly like Father" (AA 168). "Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us," once again linking *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* and reaffirming the repetition of history as well as the mutability of time (AA 210). Transferring this



capability of substitution, readers can see the transposable aspects of many of Faulkner's characters in these two novels.

The triangle of Henry, Bon, and Judith provides a strong example of this kind of interconnected and reciprocal relationship:

“[ . . . ] it was not Judith who was the object of Bon's love or of Henry's solicitude. She was just the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve, not the illusion of himself nor his illusion of the other but what each conceived the other to believe him to be—the man and the youth, seducer and seduced, who had known one another, seduced and been seduced, victimised in turn each by the other, conqueror vanquished by his own strength, vanquished conquering by his own weakness, before Judith came into their joint lives even by so much as girlname.”

(*AA* 95)

According to this passage, Henry and Bon have a relationship of their own before Judith herself enters the love triangle. Henry is also in love with Judith and lives vicariously through Bon, pushing for their marriage. Yet, “ ‘he loved Bon, who seduced him as surely as he seduced Judith’ ” (*AA* 76). Henry then also lives vicariously through Judith in order to fulfill his desires towards Bon. Bon captivates both of the Sutpen children, which should facilitate his mother's plan of revenge, but because of the threat of miscegenation as well as the doom imbued within Sutpen's ruthless ambitions, Bon dies at Henry's will. However, Bon loves both of the Sutpen children as well: “ ‘It was because Bon not only loved Judith after his fashion but he loved Henry too and I believe

in a deeper sense than merely after his fashion. Perhaps in his fatalism he loved Henry the better of the two, seeing perhaps in the sister merely the shadow, the woman vessel with which to consummate the love whose actual object was the youth' ” (AA 85-86). This subtly implied homoerotic desire allows the reader to enter into the psyche of Bon. He desires to be with Henry but knows that he cannot. Thus, he desires Judith because he can sublimate and complete the partial relationship that he has already with Henry. Bon can acceptably obtain a relationship with Judith because of her gender. Correspondingly, the social dimension of Bon's aspiration to be Henry develops from his desire to be recognized by Sutpen: to be Henry is to be Sutpen's acknowledged son. Yet, for Bon, as for his father, vengeance proves tragic.

As Rosa Coldfield retells the Sutpens' story to Quentin, she describes the day Henry kills Bon, after which Henry bursts into Judith's room where he finds her holding her wedding dress before her and declares “*Now you cant marry him. [ . . . ] Because he 's dead. [ . . . ] I killed him*” (AA 139-140). Rosa continues telling the story but Quentin remains fixed on this incident: “He (Quentin) couldn't pass that. He was not even listening to her” (AA 140). Quentin's obsession with the love triangle of Henry, Bon, and Judith provides further explanation for his behavior in *The Sound and the Fury*. After Quentin sees how Henry solves the problem of losing his sister by killing her seducer, Quentin, “about half way between madness and sanity,” sees how death serves as an escape from the toil of his life without his sister, Caddy (FU 94-95).

Just as racism informed Quentin's thinking about shadows, racism remains a prevalent theme throughout *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. When Henry finds out that Bon has married and has a child with an octoroon mistress he desires

Bon to renounce the woman: “ ‘and Bon—the trump now, the voice gentle now: “Have you forgot that this woman, this child, are niggers? You, Henry Sutpen of Sutpen’s Hundred in Mississippi? You, talking of marriage, a wedding, here?” and Henry—the despair now, the last bitter cry of irrevocable undefeat: “Yes. I know. I know that. But it’s still there. It’s not right. Not even you doing it makes it right. Not even you” ’ ” (AA 94). Henry struggles with this knowledge for one of two reasons. If he knows and accepts that Bon, according to Sutpen, is part Black, then Henry must be against marriage between two Black people. If he has not quite accepted Bon’s race, he despises the miscegenation between Bon and his part Black wife.

Henry Sutpen confronts the threat of both miscegenation and incest if Bon marries Judith. However, the incestuous relationship does not concern Henry; he agonizes over the miscegenation. The reader sees how pertinent the “one-drop” rule was to many people of the time period. The reader assumes that Bon’s skin cannot be very dark because his mother passed for white or Hispanic; Sutpen only discovered that she too had Black blood in her after they were married and had Bon. As Bon and Henry approach the gates of Sutpen’s Hundred, they discuss Bon’s racial background. “—*So it’s the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear*” (AA 285). Later in the scene, Henry declares, “—*You are my brother*” and Bon replies, “—*No I’m not. I’m the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry*” (AA 286). Bon knows that threatening Henry by way of sleeping with their sister will incite him all the more if Bon reminds Henry of his race; he uses this forceful language in order to provoke Henry’s temper (“ ‘Because [Henry] never thought. He felt, and acted immediately’ ” (AA 77)). Again, this insinuation of the importance of racial purity reminds readers of the hatred

and fear of the “other” (and conversely, through Sutpen’s story, the social realities of race relations undermine the mythical legends of the “old virtues” founded by Cavalier aristocracy).

Bon’s rash provocation of Henry comes from his desire for revenge against Sutpen, who will not acknowledge him as his son. Bon attempts to foil Sutpen’s design any way possible, whether by marrying Judith, with the threat of miscegenation, or inciting Henry to murder him, which would in turn cause Sutpen to repudiate his only acknowledged son. Bon only yearns for Sutpen to acknowledge him as his son:

“(Bon) agreeing at last, saying at last, ‘All right. I’ll come home with you for Christmas’, not to see the third inhabitant of Henry’s fairy tale, not to see the sister because he had not once thought of her: he had merely listened about her: but thinking *So at last I shall see him, whom it seems I was bred up never to expect to see, whom I had even learned to live without*, thinking maybe how he would walk into the house and see the man who made him and then he would know; there would be that flash, that instant of indisputable recognition between them and he would know for sure and forever—thinking maybe *That’s all I want. He need not even acknowledge me; I will let him understand just as quickly that he need not do that, that I do not expect that, will not be hurt by that, just as he will let me know that quickly that I am his son.*” (AA 255)

At this point in the story, Bon does not even want to see Judith, has not even thought about her; he only wants to meet Sutpen and be acknowledged as his son. When Bon

finally meets him, Sutpen offers no indication of recognition, thus thrusting Bon into desperation. Here, Sutpen repeats the affront that he received when he was turned away by a Black servant at the front door of a large plantation as a child; Sutpen turns Bon away from his door, contrary to his original plan of accepting a young boy at his front door: “ ‘that now he would take that boy in where he would never again need to stand on the outside of a white door and knock at it: and not at all for mere shelter but so that that boy, that whatever nameless stranger, could shut that door himself forever behind him on all that he had ever known’ ” (*AA* 210). Ironically, the wheel has come full circle as Sutpen has become the ruthless plantation owner of his childhood affront after embarking on his monomaniacal quest demonstrating that wealth and power corrupt the soul. Sutpen’s callous attempt to forge a dynasty creates the antithesis of the mythic Southern gentleman plantation owner; a bloodless outsider who “made no pretense to be anything else except what he was, and so he violated the local mores,” he utterly disregards the “old virtues,” the prescribed notions of patriarchal Southern family, honor, and gentility (*FU* 80). Sutpen’s defiance of Southern ideals fixates Rosa’s hatred. Quentin struggles with Sutpen’s pitiless design, for it undermines the traditional aristocratic and patriarchal plantation owner (most notably, his grandfather) that Quentin has known and revered his entire life; Sutpen’s gross disrespect for these Southern values instigates Quentin’s loss of faith in the past and accelerates his sense of doom.

Quentin describes Sutpen as the man “who must have seen his situation as that of the show girl, the pony, who realises that the principal tune she prances to comes not from horn and fiddle and drum but from a clock and calendar” (*AA* 148). Sutpen worries that he will not have enough time to carry out his design and recognizes that time will

cause his demise. Essentially, time succeeds in overcoming Sutpen in the form of Wash Jones and a scythe, alluding to the myth of Chronos, Father Time, whose symbol also was a scythe or sickle. In his book, *A Southern Renaissance*, Richard H. King states:

Sutpen seeks to repudiate his own past. But this is his doom, since what he repudiates returns to destroy him. [ . . . ] Bon is the incarnation of Sutpen's past which returns to ruin his "design."

This return of the repressed is also seen in the figure of Wash, who slays Sutpen with the scythe, the symbol of time's inexorable ways [ . . . ]. Sutpen's mistake lies in a misrecognition of time and in an attempt to deny it. (124)

King describes the repetition of events inevitably brought about by the passage of time; those denied by Sutpen reappear to destroy him. Bon returns to enforce his mother's revenge upon Sutpen while Wash returns to murder Sutpen for taking advantage of his granddaughter in an attempt to father another son. Sutpen's "misrecognition of time" leads to his fear of time and this fear directly corresponds to Quentin's fear of time, clock time in particular, in *The Sound and the Fury*. Much like Macbeth and Sutpen, Quentin fears the inexorable progression of time. However, as time moves forward and Caddy becomes more removed from his life, Quentin places extreme value on his sister and focuses all of his energy on attempting to preserve her honor and keep her for himself.

### Sisters

“ ‘—Have you noticed how so often when we try to reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief, the only possible belief, that they stemmed from some of the old virtues?’ ”

(AA 96)

The importance of sisters remains prevalent in Faulkner's novels. In an introduction written in 1933 to *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner describes his original concept for the novel: “I, who had three brothers and no sisters and was destined to lose my first daughter in infancy, began to write about a little girl” (Intro SF 230). This absence of females creates a void for Faulkner to fill with his female characters and sister relationships. In Gwynn and Blotner's *Faulkner in the University*, Faulkner describes his motivations for writing about women: “It's much more fun to try to write about women because I think women are marvelous, they're wonderful, and I know very little about them [ . . . ]—it's much more fun to try to write about women than about men—more difficult, yes” (45). Faulkner often creates female characters that symbolize endurance. While most Faulknerian critics tend to ignore or evade the aspect of sisters in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, these female relationships remain important and unavoidable. Faulkner's interest in writing about women because they remain mystical and incomprehensible to him indicates that women and sisters create pertinent aspects to be analyzed in these two novels.

The Coldfields provide one set of sisters who suffer the effects of Thomas Sutpen. Despite the 28 years separating their age, Ellen and Rosa Coldfield provide the key elements to Sutpen's attempted dynasty. Sutpen marries Ellen for her good name and

respectable family and she successfully bears him two children, one being the son that could allow Sutpen to ascertain his power over others. However, after Henry kills Bon, the first failed son, and runs away, Sutpen must start over. His next candidate, Rosa, becomes a good choice for him because she has the same birthright as Ellen and is a youthful, childbearing age. Fortunately, Rosa displays her righteousness as a woman and refuses to give in to Sutpen under his demands of only marrying if she bears him a son. In doing so, Rosa foils Sutpen's third attempt at his dynasty. In her essay, "Familiar and Fantastic: Women in *Absalom, Absalom!*," Deborah Clarke describes Rosa's affront:

Rosa's action, then, can be seen as a serious undermining of conventional reality—that is, if one views conventional reality as defined by patriarchal family units. She becomes the vampire, not only ghoulishly feeding off the family, but vigorously refusing to nurture a new family, refusing to accept the premise of wife as breeder; she prefers her marginal, unconventional role as spinster, thereby hastening the collapse of the Sutpen dynasty. (64)

Although Rosa dies an embittered virgin, she rejects Sutpen and aids in destroying his selfish attempt to create a dynasty. Even though Quentin views Rosa as having "the rank smell of female old flesh long embattled in virginity," and as a "garrulous outraged baffled ghost," Rosa retains her strength as a character by standing up to Thomas Sutpen (AA 4). Faulkner describes Rosa as "Miss Coldfield in the eternal black which she had worn for forty-three years now, whether for sister, father, or nothusband none knew" which undercuts the strength of her declination of Sutpen because no one knows if she grieves for Ellen, Mr. Coldfield, or Sutpen, putting her in a position of ridicule (AA 3).



Clarke sees Rosa as the person in control of the situation, “hastening the collapse of the Sutpen dynasty” in order to execute her revenge on Sutpen for the offenses he has committed against her and her family.

Conversely, Rosa declares in the beginning of her narrative to Quentin that she acquiesced to Sutpen’s request of marriage despite the horrors she saw Sutpen create: “I saw that man return—the evil’s source and head which had outlasted all its victims—who had created two children not only to destroy one another and his own line, but my line as well, yet I agreed to marry him” (AA 12). Rosa describes Sutpen as pure evil, the one responsible for the downfall of the Suptens as well as the Coldfields; she rests the blame of her sister’s demise on Sutpen’s overpowering and self-seeking dream. Rosa is unsure why she consents to a marital union with Sutpen after the harms he has perpetrated against the people she cares about. Yet only after he insults her with the proposal of a sexual union in order to beget a son does she reject his offer, as if it took a personal insult in order for her to fully grasp the amorality of his ruthless design.

Through displacement, Rosa also becomes a sister figure to Quentin. Faulkner uses many of the same words, such as “impotent,” “ghost,” and “virgin,” to describe Quentin and Rosa, creating a unifying bond between them. Even though Quentin tries to distance himself from Rosa by referring to her in negative terms, he, too, dies “embattled in virginity.” Similarities connect Quentin and Rosa as characters who, through the story of Thomas Sutpen, achieve a complex relationship that Quentin does not experience with any other character from *Absalom, Absalom!*, for Sutpen’s story brings them together and together they discover unknown aspects of the story. Rosa enables Quentin to learn things about Sutpen that his father could not have told him, while Quentin allows Rosa to

return to Sutpen's Hundred and see Henry one more time. Shreve describes Rosa near the close of the novel:

“[ . . . ] she refused at the last to be a ghost. That after almost fifty years she couldn't reconcile herself to letting [Sutpen] lie dead in peace. That even after fifty years she not only could get up and go out there to finish up what she found she hadn't quite completed, but she could find someone to go with her and bust into that locked house because instinct or something told her it was not finished yet.” (AA 289-290)

Once again demonstrating Rosa's immense loathing of Sutpen and noting the near absurdity of her obsession with never forgiving him, Shreve questions Quentin's illogical reason for accompanying Rosa to Sutpen's Hundred on a mere “instinct.” Rosa chooses to narrate as well as physically involve Quentin in the tragedy of the Sutpens because of his grandfather's relationship with Sutpen. Mr. Compson explains to Quentin: “ ‘She may believe that if it hadn't been for your grandfather's friendship, Sutpen could never have got a foothold here, and that if he had not got that foothold, he could not have married Ellen. So maybe she considers you partly responsible through heredity for what happened to her and her family through him’ ” (AA 8). Rosa wishes for a conclusion to the story that has haunted her entire life and impinged on those surrounding her and explains her reason for her intense hatred of Sutpen: “*And that's what she cant forgive him for: not for the insult, not even for having jilted her: but for being dead,*” “now only the lonely thwarted old female flesh embattled for forty-three years in the old insult, the old unforgiving outraged and betrayed by the final and complete affront which was

Sutpen's death" (AA 137, 9). She feels cheated out of her life because it comes to a halt when Sutpen enters it. Being dead, Sutpen prevents Rosa from exacting her revenge upon him for the upheaval he causes during her life; his greatest insult to Rosa then, is dying. Shreve, as an outside narrator, does not truly understand Rosa's skewed relationship with Sutpen, as Quentin notes: "You cant understand it. You would have to be born there" (AA 289). Even though Shreve enjoys the Sutpen story, he does not understand Quentin's extreme psychological connection to it and even challenges Quentin on his understanding. Again, Faulkner creates an undoubtedly united bond between Quentin and Rosa as we watch both strive for "the be-all and the end-all" solution and conclusion to the Sutpen legacy so that they can close off and try to come to terms with that aspect of their lives.

Another factor in Rosa's abhorrence of Sutpen is her sister, Ellen, who remains a helpless figure in *Absalom, Absalom!* while Sutpen crushes her:

Ellen was dead two years now—the butterfly, the moth caught in a gale and blown against a wall and clinging there beating feebly, not with any particular stubborn clinging to life, not in particular pain since it was too light to have struck hard, nor even with very much remembrance of the bright vacuum before the gale, but just in bewildered and uncomprehending amazement—the bright trivial shell not even to any great extent changed. (AA 66-67)

Ellen offers an ethereal counterpart to Rosa; they are similarly described as airy beings, Rosa as a ghost, and Ellen, a butterfly. Describing her as a "shell," a fragile membrane void of any real substance, demonstrates Ellen's weakness and submission to Sutpen's

overbearing domination as Faulkner uses Ellen to describe the complete downfall of a character overcome by Sutpen. Ellen does not really realize that Sutpen suppresses her being and only watches “in bewildered and uncomprehending amazement.” Ellen, once the bold mother confronting Sutpen about allowing Henry to watch the fight between himself and a slave who then chastises him for possibly allowing Judith to watch the same fight, develops into “the butterfly, the moth [ . . . ] beating feebly” against the rough wind of Sutpen’s design and ultimately succumbs to the overbearing presence of Sutpen and cannot escape it. Rosa defends Ellen by despising Sutpen and blaming him for Ellen’s downfall. Sutpen’s power isolates and encloses Ellen as well as Rosa:

“[ . . . ] who had taught Miss Rosa to look upon her sister as a woman who had vanished not only out of the family and the house but out of life too, into an edifice like Bluebeard’s and there transmogrified into a mask looking back with passive and hopeless grief upon the irrevocable world, held her there not in durance but in a kind of jeering suspension by a man [ . . . ] who had entered hers and her family’s life before she was born with the abruptness of a tornado, done irrevocable and incalculable damage, and gone on.” (AA 47)

Sutpen has exiled Ellen from the world and changed her “into a mask looking back with passive and hopeless grief upon the irrevocable world.” Ellen, a tragic character, becomes despondent and weak in the wake of Sutpen’s “tornado.” The world has forsaken her and Ellen has been forced into this desolate state by Sutpen’s “jeering

suspension.” Sutpen imposes his patriarchal supremacy over Ellen and forces her into the matriarchal role of submissive wife.

Judith and Clytie provide a second set of sisters, who, although they also suffer due to Sutpen’s ruthlessness, possess an added dimension of race, which the Coldfields do not. These characters provide examples of strong, selfless females in *Absalom, Absalom!*. The parallel here to *The Sound and the Fury* is in Dilsey who “held that family together for not the hope of reward but just because it was the decent and proper thing to do” (*FU* 85). Shreve describes Judith as “the calm face, the hands which could plow or cut wood and cook or weave cloth folded before her, standing in the attitude of an indifferent guide in a museum” (*AA* 157-158). Judith remains a composed person; she cries only once when Sutpen returns from the war and she tells him that Henry has killed Bon. Judith lives a difficult life and is still able to tend to others. Displaying her love for Bon, Judith cares for Charles Etienne de Saint Valery Bon and contracts his yellow fever, “ ‘though it was Judith who died first’ ” (*AA* 170). Clytie, too, takes on a motherly, protective role in Charles Etienne’s life by bringing him to Sutpen’s Hundred to live. Together they attempt to raise the child in order to alleviate some of the grief and guilt over Bon’s death.

In his essay, “History and the Sense of the Tragic: *Absalom, Absalom!*,” Cleanth Brooks describes Judith as “one of Faulkner’s finest characters of endurance—and not merely through numb, bleak stoicism but also through compassion and love. Judith is doomed by misfortunes not of her making, but she is not warped and twisted by them. Her humanity survives them” (201). Judith displays her love for humanity through her role of caretaker for Charles Etienne and by remaining true to Sutpen’s Hundred, where

she lives and tends to the plantation even after it has started to collapse. Even though Judith faces many tragic instances, such as her brother murdering the man she plans to marry, she can humble herself through taking in the child that Bon begot with another woman. “The story of Judith,” Brooks declares, “though muted and played down in terms of the whole novel, is one of the most moving that Faulkner has ever written” (201). Brooks indicates the importance of Judith as a female character but lacks in describing her importance as a sister to Henry, Bon, and Clytie. Subsequently, she can also be seen as a sister to Caddy because of their incestuous desires towards their brothers.

Judith and Clytie have remained together since their childhood and Clytie, even after Judith’s death, continues to live at Sutpen’s Hundred watching over Henry Sutpen who has returned to the plantation to die. Clytie maintains her evocative presence over the plantation, often described as Sutpen’s aura over the plantation when he is away: “*his own clairvoyant will tempered to amoral evil’s undeviating absolute by the black willing blood with which he had crossed it [ . . . ] [a] replica of his own which he had created and decreed to preside upon his absence*” (AA 110). Rosa, being “honorable, enemies” with Clytie, describes her as: “*Clytie who in the very pigmentation of her flesh represented that debacle which had brought Judith and me to what we were and which [ . . . ] she declined to be that from which its purpose had been to emancipate her, as though presiding aloof upon the new, she deliberately remained to represent to us the threatening portent of the old*” (AA 126). Clytie, representing the “other” who is ultimately connected to the self (being Judith’s half-sister), initiates fear of the future, almost as a bad omen to Rosa, depicting the downfall of the Sutpen plantation.

One of Faulkner's numerous triangles consists of Rosa, Judith, and Clytie as they await the return of Thomas Sutpen from the war. Living in a symbiotic relationship, these women subsist through their interdependence on one another:

“It was as though we were one being, interchangeable and indiscriminate, which kept that garden growing, spun thread and wove the cloth we wore, hunted and found and rendered the meagre ditch-side herbs to protect and guarantee what spartan compromise we dared or had the time to make with illness, harried and nagged that Jones into working the corn and cutting the wood which was to be our winter's warmth and sustenance; —the three of us, three women.” (AA 125)

Again, Faulkner provides a clear example of strong female characters. Rosa, Judith, and Clytie remain resilient to the hindering forces around them and remain stable without a dominant male figure. Rosa explains the only reason she remains at Sutpen's Hundred while Sutpen is away: *“I stayed there and waited for Thomas Sutpen to come home. [ . . . ] I waited for him exactly as Judith and Clytie waited for him: because now he was all we had, all that gave us any reason for continuing to exist [ . . . ] knowing that he would need us, [ . . . ] Not that we would or did need him”* (AA 124). Perversely or not, Sutpen remains the unifying factor for Rosa, Judith, and Clytie, explaining why he *“gave [them] any reason for continuing to exist.”* Even though Sutpen unsuccessfully attempts to forge his dynasty and thus exert his power over his family, he still holds sway over these three women. His being, absent from the actual plantation, still permeates it and

remains a constant reminder to the women of himself and his attempted dominion over them.

These three women, along with Caddy, provide the driving force for much of the action in the novels. While each of them undergoes many travails, each provides a powerful counterpart for the men in the novels. Deborah Clarke describes the influential conduct of these women:

Their beliefs and motivations either remain hidden or are presented in a thoroughly incomprehensible manner. And it is the strength of this dual nature which enables them to outlast the men, invalidating Mr. Compson's notion that the defeat of southern men caused the de-substantiation of southern women. Rosa lives on outrage for forty-three years, surviving the demon who insulted her and even reversing his death through the virulent hate which will not let him stay in the grave. Clytie destroys the "rotten mausoleum" to protect the family skeletons, and Judith lives to erect tombstones, thereby immortalizing her father's repressed and repudiated past. They all live, their lives ghoulishly associated with the deaths of their men, and their very existences marking their triumph over the non-existent Sutpen dynasty. (68)

Clarke depicts both the gothic aspect of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the mystical aspect of the women of Sutpen's Hundred, demonstrating the almost supernatural power these women wield over the men in their lives. They find a way to outlast the men through keeping a hatred alive, burning down the decrepit plantation, or eternalizing Bon, one of



the causes of Sutpen's downfall, through a tombstone. Clarke indicates the "incomprehensible manner" in which these women live. Rosa admits: "*We were three strangers*" (AA 126). Even though they endure on the plantation, each faces hardships of her own.

Mr. Compson details the distinctive bond between Henry and Judith and also alludes to the incestuous desires between them when Bon plans to marry Judith:

"No engagement, no courtship even: he and Judith saw one another three times in two years, for a total period of twelve days, counting the time which Ellen consumed; they parted without even saying goodbye. And yet, four years later, Henry had to kill Bon to keep them from marrying. So it must have been Henry who seduced Judith, not Bon: seduced her along with himself from that distance between Oxford and Sutpen's Hundred, between herself and the man whom she had not even seen yet, as though by means of that telepathy with which as children they seemed at times to anticipate one another's actions as two birds leave a limb at the same instant; that rapport not like the conventional delusion of that between twins but rather such as might exist between two people who, regardless of sex or age or heritage of race or tongue, had been marooned at birth on a desert island: the island here Sutpen's Hundred; the solitude, the shadow of that father with whom not only the town but their mother's family as well had merely

assumed armistice rather than accepting and assimilating.” (AA 78-79)

Faulkner’s description of “two people who, regardless of sex or age or heritage of race or tongue, had been marooned at birth on a desert island” perfectly describes many of the relationships present in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. The townspeople have “assumed armistice rather than accepting and assimilating” with Sutpen. Even though he destroys their vision of Southern gentility, the townsfolk seem to leave him alone instead of welcoming him into their community or taking on his ruthless ways of living. Sutpen detaches himself from not only the people in his community but his family as well, depicting one of Sutpen’s tragic flaws: isolation from mankind. He creates this separation through his attempted selfish design of creating a dynasty in his shadow which will carry on his legacy. Brother and sister relationships, as well as romantic or sexual relationships, occur between members of both genders and different nationalities. However, they are all brought together “on a desert island” where they can live and metamorphose into one another. Much information about both novels can be gained from this quotation which details an almost mystical understanding of the two Sutpen children that may correspond to Quentin’s relationship with Caddy. This passage shows the reader the minimal time Bon spent with Judith yet they plan to marry. The reader also sees the incestuous innuendos between Henry and Judith, as well as Henry and Bon. “So it must have been Henry who seduced Judith, not Bon,” suggests Henry’s desire for his sister and her acceptance of his desire in allowing herself to be seduced.

Of course Caddy provides the most analyzed sister figure among Quentin’s many sisters in the two novels. She influences her three brothers, Quentin, Jason, and Benjy,

and remains the driving force in each of their narratives in *The Sound and the Fury*. For Benjy, she symbolizes safety and security; she provides the mother figure for Benjy because their own mother remains inadequate. For Quentin, she represents the “empty vessel” that contains his feelings of love and obsession. Jason views her as the cause of his monetary problems because Herbert Head divorced her after promising Jason a job at the bank. For Benjy and Quentin, Caddy provides a positive source of love, while for Jason, her name becomes synonymous with treachery and wickedness.

Henry struggles desperately to save his sister’s honor, very much like Quentin tries to preserve Caddy’s honor:

“—Henry, the provincial, the clown almost, given to instinctive and violent action rather than to thinking, ratiocination, who may have been conscious that his fierce provincial’s pride in his sister’s virginity was a false quantity which must incorporate in itself an inability to endure in order to be precious, to exist, and so must depend upon its loss, absence, to have existed at all. In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realising that the sister’s virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would be despoiled, choose for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride. Perhaps that is what went on, not in Henry’s

mind but in his soul. Because he never thought. He felt, and acted immediately.” (AA 76-77)

In detailing Henry’s love for his sister, as well as for Bon, her seducer, a striking parallel is created for Quentin’s feelings towards his sister, Caddy. Similar to Henry’s realization about Judith, Quentin realizes in *The Sound and the Fury* that Caddy’s virginity must be lost in order to prove that it had ever existed at all: “And Father said it’s because you are a virgin: dont you see? Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It’s nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That’s just words and he said So is virginity and I said you dont know. You cant know and he said Yes. On the instant when we come to realise that tragedy is second-hand” (SF 73-74). This “second-hand” “tragedy” may, in Quentin’s mind, refer back to Henry’s struggle with his sister losing her virginity. Henry realizes that Judith’s honor may be tainted if she succumbs to Bon’s seductions. However, because Henry wishes to become Bon, he discovers how he can consummate a relationship with Judith through Bon. Similarly, Henry also wishes to become “the sister, the mistress, the bride” in which he would be able to create a marriage with Bon. Interestingly, Bon is often described as feminine: “There must have been nights and nights while Henry was learning from him how to lounge about a bedroom in a gown and slippers such as women wore, in a faint though unmistakable effluvium of scent such as women used, smoking a cigar almost as a woman might smoke it” (AA 253). However, while Henry rehearses the feminine role, in shooting Bon before the gates of Sutpen’s Hundred, he assumes the masculine role “[b]ecause he never thought. He felt, and acted immediately,” thus allowing him to murder the brother that he loved greatly.

As he merges the images of the men that affect his life, Quentin describes his metamorphoses with Henry and, similarly, Henry's symmetry with Bon (" 'whom he watched aping his clothing carriage speech and all and (the youth) completely unaware that he was doing it' " (AA 252)), thus allowing Quentin to share and exchange both of them with Shreve: "So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas eve: four of them and then just two—Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry" (AA 267). This transposable, fluid relationship is related to Irwin's idea of Quentin as both brother seducer and brother avenger. However, Quentin overtly pairs himself with Henry, not Bon, perhaps in an attempt to become the more desirable brother avenger rather than the more deviant brother seducer: "Quentin projects onto the characters of Bon and Henry opposing elements in his own personality—Bon represents Quentin's unconsciously motivated desire for his sister Candace, while Henry represents the conscious repression or punishment of that desire" (Irwin 28).

### **Conclusion: A Pinch of Dust**

"Well, the individual is not too much, he's only a pinch of dust, he won't be here very long anyway, but his species, his dreams, they go on. There's always somebody that will keep on creating the Bach and the Shakespeare as long as man keeps on producing."  
(FU 286)

Faulkner clearly demonstrates the importance of storytelling as well as the universality of narrators in the dialogue between Quentin and Shreve recreating the story of Thomas Sutpen. Indicating the interdependence and interchangeability of narrators, Faulkner shows that the story is the most important entity and as long as it is being

spoken and heard, the identity of the storyteller often, even necessarily, becomes less evident and less certain. Proposing that Faulkner felt the same about the stories he created, he would accept that a story remains eternal after the author has passed out of existence: “ ‘to make that scratch, that undying mark on the blank face of the oblivion to which we are all doomed’ ” (44 102). Through Quentin and Shreve, Faulkner demonstrates the fluidity of their narration:

That was why it did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other—faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived—in order to overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault nor false. (44 253)

This “happy marriage,” which occurs in chapter eight, does not last because in chapter nine, the conclusion of the novel, Quentin and Shreve are portrayed as very separated. Shreve proposes his sardonic prediction that “ ‘in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. [ . . . ] and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings’ ” and after which he asks Quentin: “ ‘Why do you hate the South?’ ” (44 302-303). Quentin, feeling very alone, helplessly and inextricably bound to Sutpen’s story and the legacy of his Southern past, pants

desperately “in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*” (AA 303). The chilling conclusion of *Absalom, Absalom!* forces the reader to return to *The Sound and the Fury* in order to fully understand Quentin’s demise, creating a necessary, circular bond between both novels.

Returning to the action of Mr. Compson giving Quentin his grandfather’s watch, he states: “I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it” (SF 48). Yet looking at this passage while allocating Faulkner as the speaker, his work as the direct object “it,” and the reader as the indirect object “you,” one sees a self-reflexive description of how Faulkner may view his literature in relation to his reader. If by reading one escapes the drudgery of one’s own life and present situation and thrusts oneself into the “timeless” realm of literature, while reading, one nevertheless experiences time in all its aspects. When reading Faulkner’s fiction in particular, as his readers have consistently noted, this rich experience of time is accentuated. Clock time elapses as the reader lifts the words from the page but the reader pays no attention to this passage of time, concerned rather with the transformation he undergoes as the author takes him on a journey into the lives of the characters and, subsequently, on a journey that will reveal a part of the self. As characters do when recalling events of the past, Faulkner’s readers constantly recall prior incidents in the novel. Memories flood the minds of the characters as well as the mind of the reader. Novels like *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* envelop the reader.

*The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* then demonstrate Faulkner’s insistence on the tragedy found in his characters. In describing Sutpen, Faulkner states:

“To me he is to be pitied, as anyone who ignores man is to be pitied, who does not believe that he belongs as a member of a human family, of the human family, is to be pitied. [ . . . ] and I think that people like that are destroyed sooner or later, because one has got to belong to the human family, and to take a responsible part in the human family” (*FU* 80-81). The uniting factor in Faulkner’s tragic characters is their conscious effort to isolate themselves from society, and in doing so, destroy themselves. When Faulkner notes that “we come to realise that tragedy is second-hand,” he indicates the repetition of the past and the tragic sense that remains insuperable to many of his characters, such as Thomas Sutpen and Quentin Compson. These characters cannot escape the doom encompassing them through their choice of isolationism. The repetition events, such as Sutpen’s initial affront at the door of the “big house” through Bon’s affront, as well as the recurrence of incestuous desires and longing to slay the father, offer clear examples of Faulkner’s endeavor to create a “mythic” emphasis in his stories:

“[ . . . ] he telling it all over and still it was not absolutely clear—the how and the why he was there and what he was—since he was not talking about himself. He was telling a story. He was not bragging about something he had done; he was just telling a story about something a man named Thomas Sutpen had experienced, which would still have been the same story if the man had had no name at all, if it had been told about any man or no man over whiskey at night.” (*AA* 199)

Time corresponds to these repetitions through its own reiterations of events. Thus, relating to his statement that “There’s always somebody that will keep on creating the



Bach and the Shakespeare as long as man keeps on producing," Faulkner becomes a great mythic writer capturing the tragic implication of his characters.

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