Creating Yoknapatawpha

Readers and Writers in Faulkner's Fiction

Owen Robinson

Studies in Major Literary Authors

Edited by

William E. Cain
Professor of English
Wellesley College

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To
Esther and Hanna

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Esther and Hanna, my wife and daughter, put everything else into the shade, while making it all worthwhile. This is for them, with all my love.

Wivenhoe, January 2006.

Introduction

> "By God. Jefferson."
>
> "Jefferson, Mississippi," a second added.
>
> "Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi," a third corrected; who, which one, didn't matter this time either since it was still one conjoined breathing, one compound dream-state, mused and static, well capable of lasting on past sunrise too . . .
>
> "It ain't until we finish the goddamned thing," Compson said. "Come on. Let's get at it."[1]

"I wish that I did have a good, lucid, simple method of telling stories." So said William Faulkner at the University of Virginia in 1957, typically self-effacing on the subject of the structural and stylistic make-up of his novels. He claimed that he was "too busy writing about men and women, human beings, the human heart in conflict with its self, with its fellows, or with its environment, to have time to bother with style."[2] Delivered towards the end of a career that spanned nearly forty years and produced a prodigious array of attempts to get untellable stories told, such a statement can strike the reader as somewhat disingenuous. Can the writer of novels like *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* really dismiss the importance of technique to such an extent; is this not contrary to the complex evidence of the novels themselves? However, this is to assume a distinction between form and content that, to Faulkner at least, cannot properly be made: "what [the writer] is trying to tell," he reasoned at Virginia, "in fact compels the style."[3] What Faulkner tries to tell in all but five of his novels is the story of Yoknapatawpha County.

For a body of work so famously multi-layered, the sense of place is very strong in Faulkner's fiction. As the most prominent author to have appeared

from the American South, he is always associated with that region, but a crucial point about his work is that the majority of it is set in a place that is entirely fictional. Yoknapatawpha is based ostensibly on Faulkner's own home region in northern Mississippi, but that it is removed from the plane of empirical fact is vital to the effect of the series in which it appears. That so many of Faulkner's novels work on such a level must cause us to consider why a writer so deeply concerned with the very real codes, history and people of his place and time would choose to so emphasise the fictionality of his literary world, however similar it may be to the South in which he lived. As we read and re-read the books that comprise the series, we see this land develop and change with the development of its inhabitants, a process as much powered by the fiction as dramatised by it. The importance of Yoknapatawpha goes far beyond the immediate concern of a setting for the stories; it is a vital part of those stories and of the processes that go towards making them live and breathe in an active, ever-evolving way.

If Faulkner's style can be said to change with each volume of the Yoknapatawpha series, then this represents his continuing attempts to get to the essence of the county and of the people that live in it. Throughout the many developments in his literary career, there is a constant in the perpetual demand on the reader to apply him or herself wholeheartedly to the material; this is a demand that is manifested in each idiosyncrasy of each novel. To a great extent Yoknapatawpha comes about through the shifting, intense relationships between the writer of the novels and the reader—or, rather, readers—of them. Of course, this in itself is not to claim special status for Faulkner's work, notwithstanding the extreme extent to which this writer-reader relationship is exploited within it. We might posit such interplay as fundamental to literary construction in general, and we can point to other examples of the reader being required to make important links in the construction of a world over a number of novels, perhaps the most obvious being Thomas Hardy's Wessex.[4] What marks Faulkner out for special interest is the degree to which such relationships are continued into the fiction itself, and to which we can see similar processes occurring between its inhabitants within the writer-reader construct that is Yoknapatawpha. The county is peopled by figures we might identify as having roles analogous to those of the readers and writers of the books themselves, figures that devote themselves to the creation of what effectively amount to texts, and figures whose lives are dominated by the need to interpret them. On this level as well, then, we can examine Yoknapatawpha as an environment constructed through the interaction of writers and readers. If anything, Yoknapatawpha can be seen as

a state of mind—or, rather, a convergence of many states of mind exercising themselves both towards and within the series of novels.

It is this crucial interplay between the reading and writing processes involved in the construction of the textual environment and those that occur within it, and the nature and significance of the world that is created between these many forces, that forms the chief focus of this study. Yoknapatawpha, I contend, is the product of these mainly mental processes of construction at all levels, and it is in the similar and even analogous situations that exist between readers and writers of and in the fiction that the dynamic of Faulkner's work is most keenly discovered. Form and content, as Faulkner implies in his comments at Virginia, are indeed one here, and the need for readers and writers to work together, whether harmoniously or otherwise, is posited as fundamental to the processes not only of fictional practice but also the building of the environments in which we live. Thereby, the entirely fictive nature of Yoknapatawpha, and the requirement for everybody involved to participate with full commitment in its creation, is central to the investigations into the "real world" issues with which Faulkner is so concerned. Faulkner, his readers, and the writers and readers within the texts are not merely required to examine a world and its mores, they have to bring it into being. To read and write Yoknapatawpha is to build it, and the process of doing so can contribute strongly to our understanding both of fiction and of the world to which it relates. Yoknapatawpha, because of its *lack* of existence in an empirical sense, can be a valuable means of interrogating those worlds that do exist, as such, and makes a very strong case for the importance of fiction itself.

This book will examine some of these processes of reading and writing in order to explore the various ways in which individual Yoknapatawphan texts are brought into being, and to consider the more broad-ranging construction of the county as a whole. I will examine a number of important relationships, all of which are fundamental to the overall creation of the county. As should become apparent, such processes can be perceived continually throughout Faulkner's work, and to provide an account of each that can be found would require a study of many times the length available here. Accordingly, my approach is to focus upon certain exemplary models as a means of considering the wider implications for the county as whole. While many of these relationships can be seen to occur over a number of novels—indeed, this is in many ways the point, as I shall discuss in my concluding chapter—my study will inevitably concentrate upon certain texts from across Faulkner's career: *Sartoris/Flags in the Dust* (1929), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932),

Absalom, Absalom! (1936), *The Unvanquished* (1938), *The Hamlet* (1940), *Go Down, Moses* (1942), *The Town* (1957), and *The Mansion* (1959). The remaining volumes of the Yoknapatawpha series—*Intruder in the Dust* (1948), *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), and *The Reivers* (1962), as well as numerous short stories—are, of course, also important to an overall understanding of the county. I do not concentrate upon them here because my concern is with various traits and themes to be more profitably examined in other works, rather than examining each constituent text in the series. My consideration of particular texts is determined by their usefulness for studying the issues at hand.

My use of aspects of literary theory is similarly based upon their possible relevance to the particular process I examine at the time. Prominent among the theorists I apply to Faulkner are Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes; I also call upon the possibilities explored by reader-oriented theorists such as Norman N. Holland, Stanley E. Fish and, most importantly, Wolfgang Iser. Each of these thinkers has a large arsenal of critical practices, many of which will remain untouched by my investigations here; similarly, there are numerous other theorists who can be applied usefully in a study of Faulkner's work. My approach here, as with my use of Faulkner's texts themselves, is to apply those aspects of those theories which suggest themselves most helpfully to the case at hand at a given time, using, to quote Faulkner's account of his own approach to writing, "the most available tool to tell what I'm trying to tell."[5]

"Part One: Faulkner and the Reader" establishes the grounds upon which the project will work by examining the relationship between these two most identifiable reader- and writer-figures. I begin by looking at one of Faulkner's most celebrated texts, *The Sound and the Fury,* considering the structural means by which the individual character/narrators of that novel are created, and the role that the reader is required to play in this process. Faulkner's manipulation of textual elements, and of his reader's need to balance these with expectations and understandings of "norms," is studied with particular reference to the first section of the novel, that of Benjy Compson; the ramifications of this are then applied to the remaining three sections of the book and Faulkner's later "Appendix" to it. Following this, in Chapter Two, I move on to *Sanctuary,* to consider a rather different relationship between Faulkner and his audience—with "audience" being the operative word here, the reader being forced into the role of disturbed but complicit voyeur in the horror that unfolds. These two apparently wildly different approaches to reader-writer relations allow us to comprehend the extremes of Faulkner's interaction with his readership, and to note the ongoing, varying

possibilities to be found within it. Such possibilities will continue to be involved throughout.

"Part Two: Writers in Yoknapatawpha" takes the terms of the investigation into the fictive world itself, examining certain figures who might be identified, metaphorically, as "writers" of chapters of Yoknapatawphan history and culture. I begin by looking briefly at Colonel John Sartoris's presentation of himself as an archetypal Southern gentleman-hero in *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished,* as a means of establishing the models which other, perhaps more prominent characters work with or against. Chapter Four gives an account of Thomas Sutpen's processes of self-creation in *Absalom, Absalom!* Sutpen is a man who comes from outside Yoknapatawpha and attempts to "write" his way into it through imitation of the models he finds there and elsewhere in the South. I make use of Bakhtin's noting of the "continual mutual interaction" between "work and world" to examine the tensions between the world Sutpen finds and tries to emulate, and the mimetic dynasty he ultimately fails to establish. By considering Sutpen as a writer or artist-figure attempting to produce a work based on the world as he understands it, we can also reconsider the long-running critical debate over how "representative" a Southerner Sutpen can be taken to be. Chapter Five looks at the career of Flem Snopes across the books of the Snopes trilogy: *The Hamlet, The Town* and *The Mansion.* Using Barthes's development of Saussurian semiology and discussion of mythmaking, I consider how Snopes approaches the tenets of Yoknapatawpha in a rather different way to Sutpen, by assuming and appropriating what he finds rather than imitating it, thereby changing the local environment irrevocably. These three figures loom large over the series as a whole, and feature as aspiring writers of "texts" that will have very great effects on the world in which they live.

"Part Three: Readers in Yoknapatawpha" examines the same set of novels as Part Two, here concentrating upon the processes of readership that are applied to the "work" of Sartoris, Sutpen and Snopes. Chapter Six considers the impact of John Sartoris's "classic" Southern myth upon his descendants, using Walker Gibson's "mock-reader" model in the negative, to demonstrate the results of the failure in communication between an intransigent text and its apparently "required" reader. I then move on to the far more complex situation to be found in *Absalom, Absalom!,* where we discover a cast of characters applying themselves to the "Sutpen text" just as the reader of the novel applies him or herself to them. Holland's discussion of the links between the interpretation of identity and of textual unity is applied to the gradual building and merging of narrative voices and accounts of Sutpen, before Iser's account of the "virtual dimension" between text and reader is used to con-

sider the extraordinary creative relationships between Quentin, Shreve and Sutpen in the latter half of the novel. In Chapter Eight, the readership of Flem Snopes across the three novels of the trilogy is discussed, partly in relation to that of Sutpen. Fish's model of "interpretive communities" is invoked to study the community of speech in *The Hamlet,* while *The Town*'s apparently dictatorial narrators are shown to be rather more contingent than they themselves might imagine. *The Mansion* represents a partial merging of the approaches of its predecessors, suggesting important links between the creative input of the writer and the formative power of narrators upon their material. This chapter also points to the contemporaneousness of Flem to his Yoknapatawphan readers, as opposed to the temporal distance between Sutpen and his, further emphasising the connections to be made between interpretation of texts and interpretation of life.

The final section of the book, "Part Four: Creating Yoknapatawpha," presents microcosmic and macrocosmic studies of ways in which some of the reading and writing processes investigated thus far can come together in dramatic form to bring about the substance of the county, and considers the wider relevance of the exercise. Chapter Nine focuses closely on a literal piece of Yoknapatawphan reading: Ike McCaslin's perusal of the family ledgers in "The Bear." As well as reflecting other reading processes found in the series, this anguished account raises very real and pertinent questions about the very suitability of the reading and writing of books in a troubled world, questions which cannot help but be asked of Faulkner and his readers too. In Chapter Ten, I examine *Light in August*'s Joe Christmas as an exemplary Yoknapatawphan character, a complex convergence of multiple voices, from those who attempt to shape him in life and the mob's construction of his crime, to Joe's own attempts to assert his identity upon the world, to the crucial interaction of the authorial voice and the reader in bringing the moral complexity of the novel to life. As a focus for the county's needs, fears, codes and prejudices, Joe is a dramatic embodiment of the Bakhtinian chronotope, both for the novel itself and for the world that it portrays. If Christmas can be considered an emblematic text, Chapter Eleven discusses *As I Lay Dying* as a novel-length distillation of the processes at work over the whole series, its numerous voices and narrative sections weaving and clashing together, and themselves containing intricate creative layers, to bring about the novel and its world. This serves as something of an introduction for the final chapter, which takes the implications of the individual cases I have discussed, as well as others, and broadens them out to apply the possibilities of my reading and writing model to the construction of Yoknapatawpha as a whole. Bakhtin is again the chief theoretical tool here, as I use examples from several novels to

discuss Yoknapatawpha as an essentially heteroglot construct, a manifestation of the dialogic relations between the huge network of voices discussed through the book. To close, I consider the broader implications of the creative situation surrounding and infusing Yoknapatawpha to suggest the importance both of the series' contribution to the richness of reader-writer relations and, ultimately, of the implications this may have in terms of fiction's value in the "real world."

This mode of investigating the literary phenomenon of Yoknapatawpha County allows us, I believe, to interpret the possibilities and ramifications of Faulkner's fiction in ways that previous criticism has not sufficiently provided for, even given the vast range of material in existence, much of it of great value in itself. During the course of the study, I will engage with various examples of Faulkner criticism from contemporary reviews to recent scholarship, both to place my own work in relation to others', and, in some cases, to take issue with particular approaches. As with Faulkner and theory, I will use critics as and when they prove useful, as opposed to always trying spuriously to be up-to-date, as such (which is not to say that I will not engage with recent work, of course). At points, I will consider certain key works that appeared during the later stages of Faulkner's career and the period soon after: prominent among these are books by Cleanth Brooks and Olga W. Vickery. These writers often take differing approaches to Faulkner, but they share an important recognition of the breadth of possibility in studying his work that laid the foundations for later, perhaps more complex readings—and, as such, maintain an important position in the critical dialogue, their relative age notwithstanding. For instance, the New Critical direction of Brooks's approach is necessarily at odds with aspects of my own: I will explore these dynamics at the relevant points in my study.

One might also consider other more specifically-directed work on Faulkner, such as the class-, gender- and/or race-oriented criticism of Myra Jehlen, James A. Snead and, more recently, Richard Godden. Richard Gray's work, both on Faulkner in particular and on the tradition of "writing" the Southern world into being, has been an important influence, with its tracing of the relationships between language and history, and the application of relevant theory—not least Bakhtin—to the fiction. My own investigation fits most clearly with this trend towards the use of theoretical models in the study of Faulkner's work, which has embraced psychoanalysis, feminism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and much more, but enables us to explore both Yoknapatawpha itself, and our relationship to it, in mutually beneficial ways. By studying Faulkner's apocryphal world as a complex network of writer- and readership, we can make important links between the actions

involved in creating texts and creating worlds, as well as giving ourselves a more involved platform from which to consider the implications of the characters, events and situations to be found therein. Furthermore, we can reflect upon the very roles of "reader" and "writer" themselves: are they really so separate as sometimes assumed? To read Yoknapatawpha is tantamount to writing it, and in the act of doing either or both we are contributing to the ongoing creation of a dynamic literary world.

Part One

Faulkner and the Reader

Part One

Faulkner and the Reader

* * *

Over the following chapters, I shall explore the ways in which we can conceive of Yoknapatawpha County as being populated by readers and writers, and as such, created, constructed by them. As the ultimate goal of this study is to come to an understanding of what Yoknapatawpha can be said to be, my method will be to work from the outside inwards, to follow, to paraphrase Quentin Compson's famous analogy in *Absalom, Absalom!,* the ripples and "umbilical water-cords" back to the "pebble" whose representation is the binding factor in this series of novels. [1] The first stage of the investigation, therefore, will be to examine those elements that we might say are furthest from the essential kernel, the representatives of the "real" world, who bring their perspectives to bear on the "represented" world within. William Faulkner himself and the reader of the novels are, of course, the parties that may most literally be referred to as "writer" and "reader," and on the face of things are those most fundamentally involved in the bringing into being of the fictional world. Traditionally, this would be a relationship of production and consumption, what Roland Barthes negatively refers to as the "classic" text requiring the reader to receive passively the wisdom of the author. Barthes goes on to discuss how the relationship between the reader and the writer can be considered in a far more interactive way, how the "writerly. . . . goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text."[2] Barthes introduces his theory partly as a response, a method of more properly criticising a body of work he deems to have outgrown earlier methods of study. As such, the terms "readerly" and "writerly" become value-judgements in his hands, only those texts that consciously strive to involve the reader deserving the acknowledgement of being "writerly."

I shall apply these concerns with direct reference to the construction of the character of John Sartoris in Parts Two and Three, but they are important factors in the analysis of reading and writing processes throughout. The nuances of the relationships between reader and writer at this fundamental stage should be applicable in more minute, specific textual detail in the processes at work within the novels and within the series, and as a result indicate the extent to which Faulkner and his readership themselves, along with the characters, can be said to "inhabit" Yoknapatawpha. By following the procedures through to their logical extremes, we should arrive at a closer understanding both of what Yoknapatawpha is, in a literary sense, and of what drives it at its deepest levels. In this section, I shall examine the relationships between Faulkner and the reader in two exemplary texts that may be said to represent different extremes in approach: *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary.* At first glance, as I shall discuss, these novels seem to be poles apart in terms of their structural demands upon the reader: in many ways, *The Sound and the Fury* represents Faulkner's most overt engagement with the constructive elements of reading, requiring us to interact with the text on every level, while *Sanctuary* would seem to stand at the opposite, "readerly" extreme, pointedly forcing us into the position of an audience who can do little but painfully observe. Upon closer examination, however, their disparate forms can be seen as mutually productive explorations of the dynamics of reader- and writership, and indicate the multiplicity of reader-writer relations to be found throughout the Yoknapatawpha series.

Chapter One

(you never smelled a frightened horse, did you?): *The Sound and the Fury*

During his time as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Virginia (1957–8), Faulkner said to a student, "I believe I'm paraphrasing Whitman, didn't he say, 'To have good poets we must have good readers, too,' something like that?"[1] While it might be going too far to suggest that Faulkner's own direct enquiring of his audience for the confirmation of his statement amounts to much more than the forgetting of an exact quote, it does indicate, even on this level, a dependence upon those very "good readers" to work and respond for themselves. With this we may consider in conjunction an aside delivered by the narrator of Faulkner's last novel, *The Reivers.* While relating the events of his childhood that form that novel's content, Lucius Priest momentarily breaks off and demands of his grandson, the implied audience within the text, "(you never smelled a frightened horse, did you?)."[2] This wears the guise of a question, but really constitutes a challenge to the younger man to attempt to empathise with an age gone by that he has little contemporary means of understanding, an age that is nevertheless crucial to his own life as a Southerner. The challenge can also be seen strikingly as from Faulkner himself to his audience—especially when we consider the almost overbearingly nostalgic tone of *The Reivers,* Faulkner's life having covered a similar period to that of his narrator here and the two often seeming interchangeable, at least in terms of sentiment. Taking the frightened horse to represent the South that Faulkner has spent his career engaging with, he can quite justifiably worry that we have not ourselves smelled it. The image is useful in considering how involved we, as readers, are in the fabric of Yoknapatawpha: do we, can we ever smell the frightened horse?

The intense concentration upon a certain locality in Faulkner's work inevitably invokes the problem of relevance for itself: there is a danger that

the situations, relationships and characters could be too specific, too particular to their environs to be of extended interest to readers elsewhere. One could reflect that a Southerner reading in, say, the 1940s, someone "belonging" to the world that Faulkner himself lived in and evoked so assiduously, would have a somewhat greater likelihood of smelling the frightened horse than, for instance, myself, an Englishman reading in the early twenty-first century. Can somebody literally half a world away from the region in question, whose experiences are in many ways dramatically different from those to be found in the novels, be expected to appreciate the finer nuances of what is happening? Given that Faulkner's readership extends around the globe, Lucius Priest's "frightened horse" challenge to his audience is a pertinent one. Can William Faulkner and Owen Robinson, as an example of a reader with physical, historical and intellectual distance from the place and time in question, communicate enough to make the environment in question some form of common ground? One could argue that this would depend on the quality and nature of the discourse, on how well the parties read and write for each other.

In one of his Virginia seminars, Faulkner named *The Sound and the Fury* as his favourite among his novels:

> It was the best failure. It was the one that I anguished the most over, that I worked the hardest at, that even when I knew I couldn't bring it off, I still worked at it. It's like the parent feels toward the unfortunate child, maybe. The others that have been easier to write than that, and in ways are better books than that, but I don't have the feeling toward any of them that I do toward that one, because that was the most gallant, the most magnificent failure.[3]

Apart from the immediate qualitative implications of this comment, the notion of a "best failure" is crucial to an understanding of Faulkner's approach to writing; that it is applied in particular to *The Sound and the Fury* gives it further resonance when we consider the operations of that novel. That Faulkner claims to have expended a huge amount of effort upon this novel would seem to run contrary to Barthes's assertions against authorial relevance in "The Death of the Author,"[4] as well as suggesting that the bulk of the responsibility for its contents must be credited to him, at least by himself. However, close reading of the novel both illuminates the artistry involved on Faulkner's part and demonstrates the reader's critical role in making the novel come to life; they are part of the same project, and it is here that the quality of the "failure" is of paramount importance.

Faulkner's fourth novel, and the second of the Yoknapatawpha series, *The Sound and the Fury* was the first explicitly to make form and technique unavoidable issues, so entrenched are they in every element of the book's content.[5] The urgency of the structure is apparent before one has read a word: a glance at the contents page shows a novel constructed of four lengthy sections designated only by four non-consecutive dates. The reader is given no indication as to who is narrating each of the sections, or even that each part does indeed have a different voice. This confusion is continued when one embarks upon the text itself. Unusually in the body of Faulkner's work, the reader is immediately plunged into the thick of the novel's substance, which, in the early stages, consists of utter confusion as to what is happening, who is telling us and how they are doing so.

> Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went on to the table, and he hit and the other hit. Then they went on, and I went along the fence. Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass.
>
> "Here, caddie." He hit. They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence and watched them going away.[6]

The defamiliarisation of what we recognise as the observation of a game of golf is deeply disconcerting, alerting the reader to the account's eccentricity. The strangeness in the description is its very *exactness*; alien though the mode of illustration may be, the "curling flower spaces" and the "flags" and "hitting" of the game are actually highly realistic. It is the lack of abstract terms like "golf" that in fact seems to remove this narrative from the concrete realities we feel more comfortable with. By actually telling us *as it is,* the narrator alienates the audience. Furthermore, the use of "pasture" to refer to what we have taken to be a golf course confuses matters even more.

It is only through the words of others that we learn the narrator's name, Benjy Compson, and through the ensuing shifts and clashes of the narrative that we begin to understand the reasons for the strange nature of his account. Benjy is thirty-three today, but has the mental age of a child; he has no notion of cause-and-effect, no awareness of the movement of time, and no power of language. As such, the actions of the men in the field neither have nor need any explanation—they simply *are;* Benjy is unable to conceive of

the binding idea that makes these people behave as they do. To borrow Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic terminology, Benjy sees a *parole,* but has no reference to a *langue* through which to give it meaning.[7] Time and again through the first section of the novel we see this principle, or, rather, lack of principle in action. Likewise, Benjy's wild shifts between various episodes from his life are presented as a continual present, his lack of awareness of time and inability to control his thoughts rendering his entire history as one aimless mass of paradoxically factual description.

But the reader is told nothing of this, for the simple reason that we are not being *told* anything. The authorial voice does give us a pointedly external description of Benjy as "a big man who appeared to have been shaped of some substance whose particles would not or did not cohere to one another or to the frame which supported it,"[8] but this is not until the final section of the novel, long after Benjy's narrative is complete, and is as separate from his experience as the comments that surround and to some degree form him. Faulkner's delaying of information is important: what would more usually be an introduction here becomes no more than another voice added to the fray. Consequently, the reader finds him or herself forced both to process the relentless flow of images, and to consider the reasons for doing so. In the very act of reading Benjy's narrative, we impose our need for order upon it, and the resulting frustration of this need goes a long way towards the construction of the character. Benjy's section is not a voice, as such, but what might be seen as a faithful transcription of his mind, and fittingly remains a collection of notes until we give our reading of it. This realisation of our explicitly constructive role is both a product of and vital to the very fabric of the novel, and Faulkner's placing of this most initially bewildering perspective at the beginning amounts to an implied assertion of the reader's responsibility here: we are required to do nothing less than create Benjy. While we may say that this principle underlies the existence of all fictional characters to a degree, Benjy is the product of the dramatic rendering of the principle itself. For while Benjy has a never-ending series of *parole* to contend with, their resonance beyond him comes only with our application of our *langue.*

Once we come to this realisation, Benjy's suitability as the opening narrator becomes apparent. Because he has no awareness of motivation, reason, contingency, he cannot exercise or be party to them either, and so he works effectively as a "camera-eye," even with regard to his own actions—"I" is detached here, an other, a being that things happen to along with all the others. Consequently, we are more at liberty to exercise our own analytical powers as an intrinsic part of the reading process than we might usually expect; indeed, we are obliged to do so. For difficult though Benjy's section may

appear, the very simplicity of the narrator himself—as opposed to his brother Quentin, the succeeding narrator—makes it possible to come to an understanding of at least *why* and *how* things are happening, if not exactly *what.* This gives another perspective to our readings of other, apparently more conventional characters.

This being the case, Benjy's poetry takes on the disquieting mantle of being unintentional, non-poetry. Time and again, the narrative uses startlingly descriptive imagery, always underpinned in the reader's consciousness by the knowledge that its source within the text can have no conception of such. Paradoxically, one can view these lines as being almost poetically ideal: as plain language, they are as close to this particular narrator's experience as possible, an effortless (unconscious) but evocative expression. These images range from pure description of environment, such as "*The slanting holes were full of spinning yellow*"[9] to describe the effects of light through knot-holes in a barn wall, to more complex evocations of feelings or impressions. The impact of progression is denoted sensorally: "We ran up the steps and out of the bright cold, into the dark cold,"[10] the sensations becoming tangible in their inextricable identification with place. Benjy's impression of the very nature of things is affected by this exclusively descriptive mode:

> We went to Mother's room, where she was lying with the sickness on a cloth on her head.
>
> "What is the matter now." Mother said. "Benjamin."
>
> "Benjy." Caddy said. She came again, but I went away.
>
> "You must have done something to him." Mother said. "Why won't you let him alone, so I can have some peace. Give him the box and please go on and let him alone."
>
> Caddy got the box and set it on the floor and opened it. It was full of stars. When I was still, they were still. When I moved, they glinted and sparkled. I hushed.[11]

This passage is indicative of several of the operations of Benjy's narrative. His description is always a matter of *writing*; as he has no interpretative powers, a *reading* of a situation is out of the question, and he can only tell it as he sees it is. As he associates the cloth on his mother's head with her sickness, he has no means for realising that the sickness is not intrinsic to the cloth itself. The lack of ambiguity in his perception of it, however, makes his unwitting transformation of the scenario a creation of a truth. As far as Benjy is concerned, there is no way in which we can dispute the cloth's culpability, and what we would normally take to be a misreading becomes a writing, a bringing into

being of a reality. In the same way, the sedative jewellery box becomes a box of "stars." Benjy recognises that their appearance is different when he moves, but he has no way of knowing his own cause-and-effect relationship with them, and is thus spellbound by their changes. This dominance of "fact" in the narrative is even carried through to the transformation of his mother's question into a statement: questions have no place in a world without ambiguity. Not that Benjy has any understanding of what are, in effect, *his* facts—he lives in a world of his own unconscious creation, but he does not how, why, or what it is, the result often being an incomprehensible terror which is expressed by his howling. The most sustained example of this facet of Benjy's mind is the leitmotif "Caddy smelled like trees,"[12] which as well as being the lynchpin of his non-poetry is vital to the reader's co-construction of him and his world, and epitomises his relationship with the character who in many ways is the novel's "absent centre," his sister Caddy (whose presentation I shall examine later in this chapter). It is the most comforting condition that Benjy knows, and any deviation from it results in terrified panic. Caddy's experiment with perfume breaks the order of her brother's constructed universe, an inexplicable deviation from his "truth" that his mind cannot accommodate. Her washing off of the offending scent results in an unstressed "Caddy smelled like trees," Benjy's mind then shifting to another episode in which "*She smelled like trees.*"[13]

But for all Benjy's writing of his world, his lack of awareness of doing so is absolute. What stops his narrative from becoming a purely "readerly" experience is Faulkner's requirement for us to recognise what is happening, and then to apply Benjy's own unconscious rules of creation to the scenes and experiences he relates. The juxtaposition of our conscious application of this alien conception of the world with our own corresponding understanding of what constitutes the "norm" creates the space that Benjy inhabits, and is the key factor in the creation of the character/narrator himself. Benjy's psyche is, in effect, a personification of what Pierre Macherey refers to as an "area of shadow"[14] around a work, the vital "unspoken" component of the text, or "the juxtaposition of several meanings which produces the radical otherness which shapes the work: this conflict is not resolved or absorbed, but simply displayed. . . . In its every particle, the work *manifests,* uncovers, what it cannot say. This silence gives it life."[15] The character that emerges through the reader's involvement with Faulkner's structural techniques *is* this silence, a silence filled with myriad voices—prominently including the reader's own—but which itself, literally, has no voice.

As the voices cannot be heard, so the silence cannot provide the "life" (and in this case, *be* the very represented life of the narrative) without a

receptor to understand or interpret it. And as Faulkner exploits the necessary silence intrinsic to the text in the conception of Benjy's character, so he exploits the reader's cognitive activity in order fully to realise the silence, to grant the silence its eloquence. Benjy's mental rambles through his thirty-three years of life, and their cumulative effect as a continual present, have no coherence within themselves; it is only through readership, in which, to quote Wolfgang Iser, "we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own,"[16] that an abstract concept like "meaning" can be applied, that the "self" of which Benjy has no idea can be said to exist. But, contradicting Barthes, Faulkner's own part in the creation of Benjy is far from diminished by the huge creative responsibility of the reader here, but is rather of intense and perpetual importance. The pointed, deliberate use of the reader, the demand that we read in a "writerly" way as an explicit aspect of form and content, is achieved through high levels of authorial skill and manipulation. True, it is essential that we bring our perspective to bear, but the materials to which we apply it are far from random, largely unlike the mental operations of the character they bring into being.

The relationship of the reader to the text being understood as vital to its fruition, Faulkner plays with the operations he establishes to enable the reader to perform his or her allotted task, to turn Benjy from being a difficult character merely understood, however effectively, to one actually living, moving through time and space in ways which he himself cannot know. The timbres, moods and states of Benjy's mind are evoked using the linguistic filter through which his observations are transmitted. While the mode never veers from the strictly descriptive, the things being described are brought about by our recognition of what they signify outside the realm of the description. We recognise the importance of key images in the evoking of a frame of mind, we use motifs to find some kind of foothold in scenes from Benjy's confused chronology. For instance, as Benjy sees a group of schoolgirls coming along the road outside the gate, his descriptions gradually take on an internally incomprehensible aspect:

> They came on. I opened the gate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. They were going up the hill to where it fell away and I tried to cry. But when I breathed in, I couldn't breathe out again to cry, and I tried to keep from falling off the hill and I fell off the hill into the bright whirling shapes.[17]

After Benjy accosts the girl, which we recognise to be symptomatic of his feelings towards his now absent sister, the descriptions that flow have no apparent relationship to anything tangible. But through a combination of going with the speed of the flow, and recognising the connotations of images, with the application of knowledge acquired through our experience of Benjy thus far, we begin both to understand what he is experiencing, and to bring that experience itself into being. The motions that Benjy describes here are akin to those we have seen in the episode of his drunkenness at Caddy's wedding, and the confusion of the presentation suggests a similar intoxicated feeling. The "bright shapes" have previously been associated with his experiences of both fire and falling asleep, and our aligning this recognition with our understanding of his mixed reactions to fire all contribute to the "silence" that is the essence of what is happening here. What is more, the reader provides the context—the loss of Caddy, Benjy's castration—that gives this episode its meaning, and enables us to understand Benjy's succumbing to the effects of anaesthetic (as I read the scene) in ways that he cannot. But for the reader to have a chance to gain all this from such sparse and confused details is an achievement of the author; the placement of details is as precise and meaningful as their results, paradoxically, are not. In a similar way, the full resonance of Benjy's seemingly intuitive realisation of Caddy's loss of virginity—and thus her irrevocable change—is only achieved through Faulkner's utilising our understanding through painful maintenance of the unswervingly passionless description and exploitation of our knowledge and forced co-authorship.

Time and again, the perceptive reader is made to bring a situation into being through such manipulation; this is all filtered through the ambiguity that lack of certain knowledge inspires, but which is not, of course, in Benjy's description *per se.* For instance, when T.P. says to Benjy, "Don't you know Dilsey whip you,"[18] the reader has to reflect upon the likelihood of this actually happening. From what we have seen of both Dilsey and Benjy, this is unlikely, in which case T.P.'s comment is highly suggestive of his nature, likewise forming him insofar as he is formed at all. However, we do not know for sure that this is the case, and the comment does add another tentative aspect to Dilsey and Benjy's relationship, whether it is truthful or not. Nothing is certain here, and the attitudes and reactions between characters are formed in all their ambiguous complexity, resulting from Faulkner's use of his reader's writerly role through intricate control over the flow and manner of information. Thus, not only Benjy and his world are created, but the world in which they exist as well, unbeknownst to the narrator. This principle applies to the novel as a whole, the relationships between voices, both of

narrators and within narratives, forming the spacio-temporal world in which the Compsons play out their drama.

I have examined the first section of *The Sound and the Fury* at length because the relationship between the reader and the writer that it both asserts and is dependent upon is at the heart of the novel's construction, and of the construction of its narrators and environment. The two narratives that follow Benjy's are wildly different in many ways, and require different reactions on the part of the reader, but that this is the case is largely due to delicately maintained continuity in the interacting roles of Faulkner and his reader. The stark individuality of Quentin and Jason's narratives is largely a reflection of the corresponding individuality of the characters themselves, rather than a change in fundamental technique on Faulkner's part, or in the reader's duties. There are a variety of new prose styles in evidence as the novel progresses on from Benjy, and the reader must apply him or herself to them accordingly, but we are basically involved in the same constructive exercise; the prose adapts itself to the machinations of the narrators' minds, in the ways that it could be seen to in the transcription of Benjy's thoughts. Olga W. Vickery and Michael Millgate, among others, have noted the gradual progression from the intensely private world of the first section to the wholly public realm of the fourth,[19] but far from being a retreat into a more traditionally objective manner of presentation, the text shows this to be down to the comparative relationships that the narrators themselves have with the world. Faulkner's own account of the novel as a series of attempts by the three brothers and then by "Faulkner" himself to tell the story is pertinent when we think of the author's role, at the furthest remove from the text, as one of transcription.[20] The effectiveness of placing Benjy first in the novel becomes apparent as we read on. Rather than a repetition of the basic expectations of the reader here, I shall examine the ways in which we are required to adapt accordingly to the different conditions formed by and forming the different voices.

As we have found, the chief difficulty in Benjy's section is the alien mode of presentation: once what is effectively a language barrier is broken, it is reasonably simple to understand the complex operations of his paradoxically simple mind. Our writerly muscles duly flexed, we now embark upon a similar, though more difficult, exercise with the markedly more complex character of his brother Quentin. One of the startling things about reading Quentin's narrative, the second section of the novel, is the discovery in hindsight of how much we actually know already, and, therefore, how much of Benjy's section we have understood, in one form or another. We are engaging in what Iser terms "advance retrospection"[21] even on a first reading, and as

the novel progresses, episodes from what we have already read take shape in developing ways, which in turn affect the nature of what we are reading now. Quentin's character is, in a sense, formed by Benjy, or by our creation of Benjy; that we read his narrative after his brother's is of vital constructive importance.

Quentin's opening considerations of the watch, his father, and the machinations of time immediately signal a departure from what has gone before:

> When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excrutiating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. 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. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.[22]

Despite the majority of this opening passage being a composed of another voice, that of his father, Quentin's own presence in his narrative is marked from the very beginning. For a start, his father's words are consciously recalled in relation to elements of his present thoughts, and as such are delivered with an underlying regard for the creative filter of Quentin's mind within the text as well as Faulkner's transcription in his role as ultimate author. Therefore, the reader must not only consider the possible meanings of the words themselves and their formative aspect upon the narrator, as we have done previously with Benjy, but also Quentin's own authorial position regarding them (a role that he reprises in much extended form in *Absalom, Absalom!,* as we shall see in Part Three). While Quentin is frequently completely overcome by his mental reliving of the past, there are nonetheless many instances, such as this, of his consciously bringing memories or voices into his current experience of the world. Consequently, Quentin is already asserted as a "self" in a way that his brother never has been, for the simple reason that he is conscious of his own being.

This said, the narrative also makes it clear that Quentin is in a far from stable mental condition, his relative sanity only making his plight all the more painful, in that it renders him open to its consequences in all their

varying forms. His intense consideration of his father's cynical nullification of life's precepts is set in direct juxtaposition with Quentin's own actions and thoughts beyond this; while Quentin's mind is frequently coloured by his father's words, they are put up for our consideration alongside the course of the narrator's final day. The opening paragraph gains greater and greater resonance as we see Quentin's inability to do as his father urges—to forget time—leading him to what gradually becomes his seemingly inevitable suicide. Our own perspective as reader greatly contributes to this feeling of fatality surrounding the oldest Compson brother, the glimpses of his life that we have gathered from Benjy's account suddenly taking on a fractured but subtly constructive resonance. Such reflections come immediately to bear upon our reading of the Benjy section, continuing to add to it through the reader's consideration. The internal intertextuality between the four sections of the novel begins to work both retrospectively and prospectively, the world of the Compsons forming in the reader's mind as he or she associates and organises its constituent elements. The relationships between the characters come alive in this way, the relative extremities of feeling in their attitudes all the more vivid for being realised through our necessarily writerly role. This fundamental part of our reading *The Sound and the Fury* is brought about through our shaping of the "areas of shadow" that have been forced into ambiguous being.

Quentin's obsession with time is sometimes almost directly displayed to the reader, virtually demanding our empathy: "You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear."[23] Such comments seem to suggest an implied addressee, but such is the introspection of Quentin's thoughts that these almost verbal thoughts are just one of the myriad voices, Quentin's most "conscious" reflections melding with the more extreme streams-of-consciousness that characterise his moments of utter absorption in the past. Quentin's sharp intelligence allows for elements of social commentary in these more ordered thoughts, the nearest we have yet come to an explicit consideration of the Southern condition:

> I used to think that a Southerner had to be always conscious of niggers. I thought that Northerners would expect him to. . . . I learned that the best way to take all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are, then leave them alone. That was when I realized that a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behaviour; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among.[24]

As with Benjy's section, and with Jason's section to follow, the prose mutates and shifts to follow the processes of Quentin's thinking. Ordered contemplation such as this is presented in the context of rapidly flowing streams of thought, slipping between scenes and words that the reader must differentiate and place. Situations are built in ever-varying intensity according to Quentin's reliving of them. The techniques that Faulkner employs to evoke this include sudden italicised voices interrupting a scene in the present, a technique we have at least partially encountered already. Here, however, the stimuli for shifts in time are not so mechanical as they are with the simpler Benjy, the present and past interchanging rapidly before our eyes:

> "Did you ever drink perfume?" Spoade said. *with one hand he could lift her to his shoulder and run with her running Running*
>
> "No," Shreve said. *running the beast with two backs and she blurred in the winking oars running the swine of Euboeleus running coupled within how many Caddy*
>
> "Neither did I," Spoade said. *I don't know how many there was something terrible in me terrible in me Father I have committed Have you ever done that We didn't we didn't do that did we do that*[25]

But Quentin's extreme emotional fluidity is represented by infinite variations on the form. Sometimes voices, actions and environment will be undifferentiated even within their scenes, such as in the extended acting out of Caddy and Quentin's sexually-tinged encounters and Quentin's fight with his sister's lover Dalton Ames. The structural manipulation comes to a head with Quentin's sudden awareness of his fight with Gerald Bland in the present, which has ensued without our knowledge as Quentin has been fighting his simultaneous battle in the past. Once again, the associations between the two scenes only come into being with the reader's ratiocination, and in doing so, the idiosyncrasies of Quentin's character are brought to life by the corresponding changing interrelationship between Faulkner and the reader signalled by the changes in prose-style.

Essentially, we "write" in a similar way throughout the first three sections, the differences in character and experience brought about through Faulkner's structural variations-on-a-theme. By the time we come to the third section, Jason's more declamatory narrative is already couched in a structural and historical context that is cumulatively affected by it and, as previously, continues to build on what has gone before. It might be tempting to suggest that Jason's section should have been placed first, his more straightforward, "sane" voice thereby allowing the reader a more accessible

entrance into the Yoknapatawpha it portrays, but this would be to miss completely the structural point of the novel. Jason's style *is* far more "conventional," and is easier to follow, the point being that this is an accurate rendering of the man himself. Following on as it does from the wild meandering of his brothers' narratives, his opening salvo of "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say"[26] strikes a violent, discordant note in the reader, and we read his bigoted pronouncements in as constructive a way as we have treated the previous voices. This is an attitude we would be unlikely to have adopted had we initially been faced with this most "public" of the three Compson accounts, which, in turn, would damage the constructive effectiveness of the other two. In treating Jason's more basic personality in a similar way, the writer and reader together bring him horribly alive; the narrative is filled with subtleties that colour his blind, hypocritical racism and misogyny with a tinge of dark comedy, once more formed through our holding of elements up to the light against each other. Our working relationship with Faulkner is less difficult here, but there is little respite as the mental rampage that is Jason Compson is laid bare against the background we provide him with; by this stage, we are necessarily implicated in situations through our vital creative role in them.

After the extreme immersion in characters' mentalities that we have experienced so far, the authorial voice that introduces Dilsey in the novel's final section is as striking a shift as any of the previous ones have been. Lush character descriptions and analyses of situations initially seem to salve the reader's writerly aches and pains, but any sense of comfort is soon shown to be illusory, and this through our continuing creative role. Our duties here are slightly different, however; for the first time, we are actually being *told* something by a voice pointedly doing so. We are no longer fundamentally required in the construction of the narrative voice, a voice which itself is not directly involved with the action, but we are heavily involved in supplying the context within which Faulkner brings into question the validity of the authorial role. As implied by his identification of "Faulkner's" voice in this section, noted earlier, there is a conscious and asserted difference between the author and his active presence in the novel: Faulkner's authorial role here is imbued with a sense of readership, in that we are perpetually aware of the gaps in its account, and therefore of the Faulkner still hovering around the characters, alongside ourselves, but apart from this assumed persona. His voice, while seeming authoritative, is full of ambiguities and questionable verdicts, and is deliberately set up in opposition to the other three narrators (who are, of course, in opposition to each other) and to our own readership/writership. When the narrative tells us that "Ben sat, tranquil and

empty,"[27] we bring to bear our analysis and occupation of this "emptiness" in Benjy's section, contributing to the account the reflection that, far from being "tranquil," this "space" is tempestuously haunted and moved by an ever-shifting multitude of voices, of which this is one. Such contentious descriptions are accompanied by authorial pondering: is Benjy's voice "Just sound[?] It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets."[28] We may agree or disagree; what is important is that we are being asked to, and that we are in as strong a position as the authorial voice is to do so. Faulkner is deliberately undermining his own authority, or at the very least questioning his validity as a commentator: paradoxically he has less omniscience here than he does as a textually absent transcriber of other voices.

Intrinsic to this authorial attempt to tell the Compsons' tale is the consideration of the futility of trying to do so; the implications of this as regards the body of text that we have read so far are manifold, serving as an implied analysis of the processes enacted throughout. Alongside the paradoxically defamiliarising (through their late appearance) character descriptions, are constant reminders that the opinions offered here are to be placed against our own and those of the other narrators, and in the context of this vast mental environment of Yoknapatawpha. In *The Sound and the Fury* we have partaken of the isolation of these starkly polarised voices, while simultaneously providing through our writerly readership the shadowy arena in which they resound; here, we are reminded that *any* act of authorship is a constructive one, and that our individual readings and writings are as subjective and tentative as any other. In a novel such as this, the connotations are multi-layered: *have* we really known any of the narrators thus far, and is our creative understanding of them destructively warped enough to have brought about a "false" Yoknapatawpha? The potential theatricality inherent in perspective is implied in this famous description of Dilsey and Benjy's journey to church:

> The road rose again, to a scene like a painted backdrop. Notched into a cut of red clay crowned with oaks the road appeared to stop short off, like a cut ribbon. Beside it a weathered church lifted its crazy steeple like a painted church, and the whole scene was as flat and without perspective as a painted cardboard set upon the ultimate edge of the flat earth, against the windy sunlight of space and April and a mid-morning filled with bells.[29]

The world here is a painted tableau, a beautiful work of art, a *construction.* The novel tries to undermine the flatness, the implicit falseness, by enabling

us to co-create and assess a multitude of voices. We now face the point that there are myriad other readings, other "painted cardboard sets." Far from bringing an inappropriate closure to the text, this final section in fact adds an even greater dimension to the relative roles of reader and writer in this novel through the infinite possible alternatives that our consciousness of our suggested ignorance brings about: in being portrayed *itself* within the novel, the reader's role as writer reads and writes itself anew, a process deeply explored in *Absalom, Absalom!,* as we shall see in Part Three.

Before going on to discuss *Sanctuary,* it is worth considering briefly the "Appendix" to *The Sound and the Fury* that Faulkner wrote for Malcolm Cowley's *Portable Faulkner* in 1946. Many years after the original publication of the novel, Faulkner again applied an authorial voice to the Compsons, who, with the great exception of Quentin in *Absalom, Absalom!,* had received little extended coverage in any novel since.[30] However, the differences between these two voices, ostensibly from the same position, are fundamentally important to their respective effects. Whereas the voice in the novel's fourth section is the narrator of one Compson day in the context of the cauldron of voices constructively at odds in the reader's mind, Faulkner here presents a genealogical portrait of the family between 1699 and 1945, from the first Compson to emigrate from Scotland through to the continuing fortunes of the surviving members up to the present day. Of course, this is a far larger period than that explicitly covered by *The Sound and the Fury,* and we are given details that are not even alluded to in the novel. The tone of the writing bears resemblance to the pseudo-biblical epic prose-sections of the later *Requiem for a Nun,* as well as foreshadowing some of Gavin Stevens's words in *The Town* and other novels, an attempt at an all-encompassing social history of the Compson family, and, notably, one bearing the demeanour of the unassailable.

The sections of the Appendix that deal specifically with characters and situations we have experienced in reading *The Sound and the Fury* are of especial interest because Faulkner is clearly coming to the book in his capacity as a reader, despite the very heavy authorial presence in the resulting work. Replete though the novel is with contradictions and ambiguities, and necessarily so given its precepts, Faulkner's rendering of its material here is frequently of questionable validity (as well as including actual mistakes, mainly of chronology, that *directly* contravene the earlier work); for instance, "Quentin III" was a man who:

> . . . loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of its eternal punishment: he, not God,

> could by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal fires. But who loved death above all, who loved only death, loved and lived in a deliberate and almost perverted anticipation of death, as a lover loves and deliberately refrains from the waiting willing friendly tender incredible body of his beloved, until he can no longer bear not the refraining but the restraint, and so flings, hurls himself, relinquishing, drowning. Committed suicide in . . . [31]

The problem with a passage such as this is not that it necessarily misrepresents Quentin as he appears in *The Sound and the Fury,* or that it has no value as a literary addition to the character as we perceive him, but rather its certainty, its specificity: there is a sense of closure here entirely missing from the novel itself, including the third-person narrative of the final section. While handsomely rendered, the explication of one of the most powerful images from Quentin's own narrative seals it, limiting the very ambiguous, edgy significance that allowed it its searing magnitude in the first place. In expressing the extent of Quentin's disturbance, Faulkner denies it the suggestive space in which to develop; he effectively shines a flashlight into the "area of shadow," thus negating it and the reader's cumulative mythologising within it. It is a reading, and an unsurprisingly sensitive one, and on its own could stand as a rather lovely piece of criticism as open to disagreement as any other. But Faulkner's inclusion of this reading, among others, in his grand history of the Compsons gives it an air of finality, as if to say, "This is what happened in *The Sound and the Fury,* in case you haven't understood." Quentin is *written* as he has not been before, and the reader's role in the process is, comparatively, negligible.

The most extreme result of this change in our relationship with Faulkner between the early novel and the mid-career addition is the smothering of the character of Caddy, in many ways the focal point of the Compsons' sounds and furies. Faulkner claimed that he did not give Caddy a voice in the novel "because [she] was still to me too beautiful and too moving to reduce her to telling what was going on, that it would be more passionate to see her through somebody else's eyes, I thought."[32] But further than this, he refused to grant her any tangible presence at all. Virtually absent from the vast majority of the text, and as such existing in the richly multiform way that the rest of the Compson family, Jefferson, and Yoknapatawpha do, there are as many Caddys as there are readers and writers in and of the book, all of them "true" to those that create her, existing in the world that is the product of these clashing perspectives. She is alive precisely because she is allowed to be, at a stage even beyond the representation of her brothers; Faulkner, the

reader, Benjy, Jason *et al* almost automatically write her through reading her, which in the context of the book grants her existence a ghostly richness beyond any other of Faulkner's characters, with the possible exception of Thomas Sutpen.

But in the 1946 Appendix, there is only one writer and one reader, and neither of them have much to do with Caddy. Here, she *is* directly portrayed, with an entry along with all the other Compsons. She was "Doomed and knew it; accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it."[33] Again, fine reading though this may be, as is the subsequent presentation of her relationship with Quentin, it is nevertheless an analysis asserted at the expense of all others: the most the reader can do is agree or disagree. Neatly pigeonholed, Caddy is eloquently reduced to the status of an exhibit. Further to this, we are also given details of her life after the time-present of the novel (1928), the majority of which account is given from the perspective of a hitherto unknown librarian who went to school with Caddy. Through this expedient, Faulkner does recall Caddy purely in her relevance to Jefferson, but still we get the feeling that we are being told too much. Part of Caddy's significance is that her central importance to the family leads to her eternal banishment from it, not just physically but in every desired sense other than as a name on the cheques that Jason steals. The intensity with which she still inhabits their daily lives is in part suggested by the textual ignorance of her current situation, the extremity of her Jefferson relevance accentuated by the negation of her life elsewhere. In here being given further details of her life, this effect is diluted, as is the "beauty" which Faulkner previously felt excluded her from the trappings of such direct representation. It is true that other members of the Compson family are documented in the time after *The Sound and the Fury,* but this is within other novels such as *The Town* and *The Mansion* (wherein some of the more glaring contradictions of the Appendix are revealed). Perhaps the vital air of mystery surrounding Caddy would not be violated if this information about her had been transmitted in a similar way, but its inclusion as an "addition" to the very novel driven by gaps in its information, both closes her character somewhat and contradicts our reading experience of *The Sound and the Fury,* as though the author was latterly concerned that his readership might not have "got it." Luckily, the Appendix stands alone, restricted to the confines of Cowley's anthology, and as such can be allowed the less harmful status of being interesting, rather than directly explicating. *The Sound and the Fury,* notwithstanding the Appendix, remains an intense and moving example of the extent to which Faulkner and the reader can work together to create a world of startling complexity and involvement.

Chapter Two

To Look Upon Evil: The Conspiring Reader of *Sanctuary*

On first impressions, it would perhaps be hard to imagine a greater shift in structural tone and effect between *The Sound and the Fury* and the novel Faulkner was to write next: the controversial and comparatively best-selling *Sanctuary.* Indeed, that it was not the next book he was actually to publish allows for an apparently more logical progression from *The Sound and the Fury* to *As I Lay Dying,* two works with a good deal more in common, at least technically. But while this may look better in a chronological list of published work it is a false comfort, and the critic must accept the fact that Faulkner, at least in terms of his own thinking, was to follow his most audaciously "writerly" early novel with one of his most apparently "readerly." It is worth noting that the version of *Sanctuary* that Faulkner wrote before *As I Lay Dying* was not that eventually published after it: his substantial revision and rewriting of the book are well-documented in numerous studies, so I shall not repeat it here.[1] This notwithstanding, the point remains that the world and approach of *Sanctuary* was the one that Faulkner turned to after *The Sound and the Fury.* It is easy to suggest that this can be put down purely to financial expediency: the critically acclaimed but largely unread author needed to write a book that people could handle more readily and therefore might buy. Indeed, many have done this, not least Faulkner himself, who called *Sanctuary* "a cheap idea, because it was deliberately conceived to make money."[2] Even if this is the case, *Sanctuary* is a decidedly mixed blessing on these terms: it may present less of an intellectual challenge than its near contemporaries on the basis of its more conventional narrative approach, but the sheer horror of what it relates soon undermines any notion of it being an easy book to read. But the profound discomfort the reader is apt to feel is not just a matter of natural disgust at a tale of rape, kidnap and multiple murder:

terrible though these events are, we cannot so easily separate form and content (and, lest we forget, Faulkner's other novels of this or any other period are hardly free from unpleasantness themselves, not least *The Sound and the Fury*). In considering this novel alongside *The Sound and the Fury,* I intend not just to show the sheer range of ways in which author and reader interact in Yoknapatawpha, but to suggest a disturbing progression in the reader's role from the apparently more complex web of possibility in the earlier book. If *Sanctuary* represents the opposite extreme in Faulkner's interaction with his reader, it also constitutes an ongoing exploration of the roles and responsibilities of reader- and writership. This being so, its proximity to *The Sound and the Fury* can perhaps be seen to make more sense, and the experience of reading it is, as a result, even more terrifying.

Coming to this novel from *The Sound and the Fury, Sanctuary*'s opening effects could scarcely be more different. Whereas, in the former, we are effectively required to become Benjy for the duration of his narrative, here we are placed in a position distinctly outside the action:

> From beyond the screen of bushes which surrounded the spring, Popeye watched the man drinking. . . . Popeye watched the man—a tall, thin man, hatless, in worn gray flannel trousers and carrying a tweed coat over his arm—emerge from the path and kneel to drink from the spring.
>
> The spring welled up at the root of a beech tree and flowed away upon a bottom of whorled and waved sand. It was surrounded by a thick growth of cane and brier, of cypress and gum in which broken sunlight lay sourceless. Somewhere, hidden and secret yet nearby, a bird sang three notes and ceased.[3]

We might reflect that the actual action, as such, here has certain similarities with Benjy's opening: "Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence."[4] Both Benjy and Popeye, from an obscured vantage point, observe the approach of a stranger or strangers absorbed in activities they struggle to understand. This partly serves to accentuate the differences in presentation and realisation of the scenes. In the opening of *Sanctuary,* there is none of the requirement for the reader to construct both scene and narrator; rather, the lush third-person narrative describes things in detail. It is as though we are being presented with a painting, a tableau fixed by the oxymoronic "meaningless and profound" birdsong "which seemed to isolate the spot."[5] This abundance of description restricts our ability to contribute to the scene's construction, but enables us to visualise it explicitly

from outside. As part of Benjy's consciousness, we watch; here, watching is all we can do. It is also virtually all we can watch: the emphasis is entirely upon Popeye's illicit observation of the as-yet-unnamed Horace Benbow. The first paragraph essentially contains two descriptions of the same thing, the second slightly more detailed than the first but both centred on the phrase "Popeye watched the man." The picture is of the watching rather than the watched. This is continued when the narrative shifts to Benbow's perspective: "In the spring the drinking man leaned his face to the broken and myriad reflection of his own drinking. When he rose up he saw among them the shattered reflection of Popeye's straw hat, though he had heard no sound."[6] Benbow watches himself, and then sees Popeye watching him. Thus, each character is introduced in terms of his being looked upon, and then of his looking back at his observer. The two men "squatted so, facing one another across the spring, for two hours,"[7] Benbow apparently held there by his awareness of Popeye's gun, an enforced state of watching that reflects ominously on the reader's position with regard to the atrocities to come.

From the first, then, *Sanctuary*'s reader is forcibly placed in a position similar to that of characters within the novel, their activities or tendencies serving to point out or accentuate our own. This "outside" status is, of course, very different to the situation in books such as *The Sound and the Fury,* but our comparative lack of involvement in the actual construction of event and character here still does not signify a complete denial of the reader's importance in the novel. That we are engaged in a different type of readership is crucial to the book's effect, and the space we occupy has a vital part to play in the notions of evil and complicity it considers so graphically. In this way, among others, *Sanctuary* looks forward to the more complex processes explored in Faulkner's next published novel, *Light in August,* a book that, as I shall discuss in Part Four, severely implicates the reader in the very atrocities s/he and Faulkner work together to bring into fictional being. *Sanctuary* does not have the subtlety of its successor in this matter, nor such far-reaching implications, but it nevertheless forces us to realise the responsibilities we take on when we read. As much as anything else, this is a book about voyeurism, and there is nobody who engages in this more fervently than its reader. What is more, the relationship between the enforcement we witness and the manner in which our own attention is enforced is strong and telling.

The chief object of the gaze is, of course, Temple Drake. Like Horace and Popeye before her, Temple's entrance is in terms of being spied upon:

> Townspeople taking after-supper drives through the college grounds or an oblivious and bemused faculty-member or a candidate for a master's

> degree on his way to the library would see Temple, a snatched coat under her arm and her long legs blonde with running, in speeding silhouette against the lighted windows . . . vanishing into the shadow beside the library wall, and perhaps a final squatting swirl of knickers or whatnot as she sprang into the car waiting there with engine running on that particular night.[8]

Temple is not so much introduced as lusted after: both we and observers within the scene are treated to an intimate and covert glance up her skirt as her frantic activity prevents her guarding against this. Of course, the onlooker is painted as male by Faulkner ("his way"), one of the many observations or constructions of the male gaze that, along with "the aggression the narrative voice seems to feel toward [Temple]," contributes to the severe male/female dichotomy that chiefly contributes to the novel's notoriety.[9] We might suspect that the "implied reader" of the text is male in this case as well, or, to take Walker Gibson's terminology, its "mock reader," the ideal receptor-figure required by the text in hand.[10] To an extent, this is bound to have an effect on our overall impression of the novel: if Faulkner conceives of the reader, his deliberately placed audience, of this book as gender-specific, then we might perceive a closure to the production of Yoknapatawpha that is otherwise absent. This said, if even this is the case, the matter is opened up again when the novel is read by someone outside the "ideal" conceived audience: a female reader. This must cause us to consider anew how important authorial intention is in such cases, when an audience apparently alienated by the text is as able to partake of it in just as constructive, though probably different, a manner as those the book might be "intended" for. This, of course, does little either to explain or excuse the gender-politics involved in Faulkner's position, but it does point to the importance of each individual reader's standpoint with regard to narrative.[11] I shall return to this matter of potential ideal readers of Faulkner's novels in my final chapter, but for now I will note that whatever the reader's identity in this particular instance, he or she engages in the same activity as those figures on the Oxford campus: staring at a vulnerable young woman. In both cases, we might question the degree of deliberateness in this: just as the narrative seems to imply that the townspeople or academics have this view foisted upon them, so the novel's reader is led by the narrator directly up Temple's skirt with little choice but to follow. Clearly, this is very different to *The Sound and the Fury* in that we have no real options over the object of our attention, but there is just enough ambiguity in the prose to register our own complicity, whether willing or otherwise. Just as we might either condemn the narrator for appearing to suggest

that Temple is "asking for it,"[12] or alternatively criticise those would suggest such a singular, reductive reading, so we cannot entirely blame Faulkner for our own readerly curiosity. The narrative is subtler than it may first appear: we "perhaps" see "a final squatting swirl of knickers or whatnot." That use of "perhaps" and "whatnot" is enough to encourage the reader to consider the possibilities, and in doing so we are immediately relieved of our own moral rectitude. This is not simply a case of being shown an indecent image: rather, the narrative forces us to recognise our own application of imagination. This is a further manifestation of Faulkner's manipulation of the reader's cognitive engagement, as discussed with relation to *The Sound and the Fury*—albeit here in somewhat simpler form—but applied with a different end in mind. If this is a rather different type of reading, it is still an interactive consideration of readership: here, the responsibilities of the reader as *audience.* As the novel progresses, we realise that though it is more obviously "readerly" than certain others in the Yoknapatawpha series, we cannot allow ourselves the illusion of innocent reception.

In his anguished discussions with Miss Jenny about the unfolding murder case, Horace Benbow cries out, "Dammit, say what you want to, but there's a corruption about even looking upon evil, even by accident . . ."[13] As *Sanctuary* unfolds, Benbow is made to view "evil" he had not previously imagined, and with which he proves morally ill-equipped to deal. His comment, though, is clearly directed towards *all* viewers of evil, and by this stage this very much includes the reader. The terrifying sequence between Chapters Four and Fourteen, in which Temple is pursued, intimidated, raped and obsessively *watched,* and Tommy—the most obsessive of the novel's watchers—is murdered, is an astonishing piece of work, surely the match of anything in Faulkner's work in terms of its realisation of purpose and effect. The Old Frenchman place becomes the site of many of the book's worst atrocities, and of our most prolonged spell of intrusive and compelling readership. As before, this is partially realised through the active watching on the part of the characters we ourselves read: our own readership is posited as taking place alongside that of the major players. This is the most sustained account of Temple-watching in the book, and virtually everything is described in terms of appearance, perception and the covert gaze. Meeting Popeye, for instance, Temple "appeared to pause. . . . for an appreciable instant," rather than "paused for an instant;" this crucially sites the power not in Temple herself but in those to whom she "appears," who can "appreciate" her—with all the sordid overtones lent to such a term in the context.[14]

The most active watcher at the Old Frenchman place is the simple and apparently well-meaning Tommy, who feels profound outrage at the conduct

of the other men towards Temple. "They ought to let that gal alone. . . . They ought to quit pesterin her," he whispers, before correctly identifying a strange light as marking her position and going to the window to look in.[15] Needless to say, we look in with him, as though Temple does not exist in her own right without being seen:

> Temple was sitting on the bed, her legs tucked under her, erect, her hands lying in her lap, her hat tilted on the back of her head. She looked quite small, her very attitude an outrage to muscle and tissue of more than seventeen and more compatible with eight or ten, her elbows close to her sides, her face turned toward the door against which a chair was wedged.[16]

Tommy seems to be motivated by protective feelings, but we cannot escape the feeling that the abject terror Temple clearly feels is at least partially constructed by the gaze of which she is apparently unaware. Her fear and childlike vulnerability, while physically shown by the chair against the door, is manifested in how she "looked," rather than "was." Both her dress and her undergarments are "scant," rendering her "match-thin" body all the more visible to the eyes peering upon her.[17] She undresses, compulsively checks her appearance in a compact, and lies down, "her hands crossed on her breast and her legs straight and close and decorous, like an effigy on an ancient tomb," presented before us as both a sacred image and an image of death and decay.[18] Ostensibly, of course, her feelings and fevered actions are prompted by the danger she senses from the other men she knows to be drinking nearby, but as Tommy whispers his pained mantra of "Durn them fellers" and begins to "writhe slowly in an acute unhappiness," we can be in little doubt that the gaze is as intrusive as the intentions of Popeye and, probably, Goodwin.[19]

This is an incredibly affecting scene, not least, of course, because of the extent of Temple's fear and the genuine danger she is in. But our engagement with this comes primarily from the empathy we have little choice but to feel for Tommy, his outrage at the other men and his "acute unhappiness" very much shared by the reader. Our own position is similar to Tommy's in many ways: we see everything he does, and Temple's privacy and fright are laid bare as much to us as to him. It is as though the reader's face is pressed up against the window pane with his, and our eyes held open to view the powerlessness and naked flesh to be found behind it. Tommy's and the reader's gaze introduce the voyeurism to the scene, and such pornographic implication as it could be deemed to have is essentially down to us. Without our eyes at the

window, even if the narrative perspective were in the room with Temple, this would be an account of a scared, undressing girl. As it is, Temple is scared, undressing and watched. Like Tommy, we are inclined to feel protective and disgusted; like Tommy, we keep our nose to the glass. Our painful discomfort at what we see is made worse by our guilty compulsion to see more.

Again we might ask, how much of this is the reader's "fault"? Given that we do not have the range of interpretive options allowed to us in such books as *The Sound and the Fury* or *Absalom, Absalom!,* can we really be blamed for our part in the voyeuristic process taking place here? After all, in *Sanctuary* it is the narrator who unequivocally tells us that Temple is "[l]ong legged, thin armed, with high small buttocks,"[20] who places us almost on her shoulder as she desperately searches for a private space in which to defecate. "When she rose she saw . . . the squatting outline of a man,"[21] a man who is never identified and as such is worryingly analogous to the reader, again being involved in basically the same activity. Is this not, as some early reviews claimed, merely Faulkner being deliberately shocking, leading the gentle reader into a moral underworld more or less regardless of his or her own feelings?[22] This might be the case were it not for the challenge implicit in the narrative: *what are you doing?* On the most basic level, we (presumably) keep reading the book, refusing to be swayed by our outrage from finding out more. This may seem rather a truism at first, but the very nature of the novel plays with these impulses. Faulkner's identification of his "cheap idea" may be disingenuous, but *Sanctuary* is, in many respects, a thriller, a page-turner, and much of the tension developed during this ten-chapter sequence is built from the encouraging of both excitement and fear in the reader. Thus we cannot honestly condemn Faulkner for cruelty without acknowledging our own tacit complicity: the book is a thriller because we are thrilled, and the application of such hard-boiled narrative elements to such terrible material is chillingly effective in making us question our own motivations for reading. Once again, form and content are wholly intertwined, refusing to provide answers to the disturbing questions raised, but siting those questions in the figure of the reader so analogous to figures like Tommy who watch the movement of Popeye's hand "[b]eneath the raincoat on Temple's breast."[23]

When it comes to the central events of the novel—Popeye's murder of Tommy and rape of Temple with the corncob—there is, yet again, a concentration on the processes of watching that appropriately becomes even more disturbing. Chapters 12 and 13 set up a troubled web of observation that is gradually pared down until there is only one set of active eyes left. Popeye watches Goodwin watching the barn, while Tommy is in the barn watching the house. Temple, terrified in the barn, is under the guard of Tommy's gaze,

the ambiguousness of this now intensified as she feels his "hand clumsily on her thigh," the space between visual protection and the potential for actual physical abuse confused yet further.[24] When Temple asks Tommy to prevent any of the others entering the barn, he retreats from this physical contact and becomes once again the obsessive watcher, "his eyes glow[ing] with a diffident, groping, hungry fire . . ."[25] The perspective now shifts to Temple, as she sees the visual, protective network being dismantled. She hears then sees Popeye's approach, and Tommy's protection through watching destroyed as Popeye shoots him as he guards against Goodwin. "Watch him, then," is the line with which Tommy is despatched, the apparently protective act ultimately used to render him fatally vulnerable. Any vestige of safety in the visual now removed, the rape proceeds with only two witnesses left:

> She was saying it to the old man with the yellow clots for eyes. "Something is happening to me!" she screamed at him, sitting in his chair in the sunlight, his hands crossed on the top of the stick. "I told you it was!" she screamed, voiding the words like hot silent bubbles into the bright silence about them until he turned his head and the two phlegm-clots above her where she lay tossing and thrashing on the rough, sunny boards. "I told you! I told you all the time!"[26]

The blind and deaf old man is present throughout the rape, but is incapable of comprehending it. Temple's screams and accusations, pleading for the protection of witness, come as the framework of watching has finally been reduced to the figure incapable of viewing anything at all. But, of course, there is still one watcher, whose presence and sensitivity to events is made all the more pertinent by the impotence of the old man. The reader is now the only agent of active perception left, the only one there to bear the responsibility of providing witness, to bring the crucial element of receptive understanding to the "void" that Temple is left "telling." Who else, indeed, is being told?

This is the horrific extreme of *Sanctuary*'s examination of the essential culpability of readership/voyeurism, and the issue is in no way resolved within the novel itself. We are not directed towards any particular feelings about either the events themselves or our part in them, but left with this feeling of guilty helplessness as we become the sole witness to the horror. Our discomfort at the quandary this leaves us in is surely only exacerbated when the situation is parodied much later in the novel. The scenes in Miss Reba's brothel are, by and large, in a comic mode, and to an extent can be seen as a form of light relief from the torment of the rest of the tale. But when the

comedy is applied to the extension of the rape-scene's implications, the reader's outrage and discomfort is quickened once again. In a somewhat simpler precursor of the kinds of narrative layering we will see in *Absalom, Absalom!,* Miss Reba tells her friends about the Temple-Popeye-Red sexual triangle:

> "I says 'I been running a house for twenty years, but this is the first time I ever had anything like this going on in it. If you want to turn a stud in to your girl' I says 'go somewhere else to do it. I aint going to have my house turned into no French joint' . . . . /Yes, sir, Minnie said the two of them would be nekkid as two snakes, and Popeye hanging over the foot of the bed without even his hat took off, making a kind of whinnying sound."
>
> "Maybe he was cheering for them," Miss Lorraine said. "The lousy son of a bitch."[27]

Substituting another man for the corncob, Popeye's sexual gratification now wholly takes the form of watching a scene he has choreographed. Furthermore, this comes to us through implied narrative layers: Minnie herself must have knelt at the keyhole to watch these goings-on, then reported it to Miss Reba, who then broadcasts in shocked terms to her companions. The comic presentation of this scene, as well as that in which Miss Reba tells Horace of Popeye watching Clarence Snopes watching Temple through the keyhole, is infused with the disturbing possibility that Popeye, Minnie and Clarence are not really engaged in anything the reader cannot be said to have already done at the Old Frenchman place. Our mixture of disgust and humour at the situation has, by this stage, taken on a somewhat self-revelatory quality.

Compared to the intellectual demands placed upon the reader in *The Sound and the Fury,* not to mention novels such as *As I Lay Dying, Absalom, Absalom!,* and *Light in August,* those of *Sanctuary* are of a much simpler and, perhaps, conventional kind. But as we have seen, if we are not required to work as hard, as such, when we read this book, this is not to imply an abdication of our duties as a partner in the creative responsibilities at hand. Were the onus of the novel not on the element of watching that suffuses every level of the action and narration, *Sanctuary* might indeed have existed only as the cruel slog through a horrific underworld that some critics have decried. As it is, however, it operates as a continuation of the study of readerly and writerly roles we can discern in some of these other novels. By foregrounding the *audience* aspect of readership, rather than the structurally creative elements previously discussed, Faulkner forces us to consider anew our relationship to

disturbing (or indeed any) material while simultaneously using that consideration to bring about the moral and emotional complexity of the book. Ultimately, we come away from this apparently more readerly novel with a plethora of unresolved questions and issues, recognising that *Sanctuary* is a more "open" text, in some ways, than we might initially have expected. Here, however, our confusion is not so much with regard to what has happened—though this element is certainly involved—but rather over our own role in the conspiracy of watching that sustains and partly produces the horror. To "look upon evil" is possibly to partake in it, and whether we like it or not Faulkner ensures that nobody looks harder or with more devastating resonance than his reader.

Part Two

Writers in Yoknapatawpha

Part Two

Writers in Yoknapatawpha

* * *

Having examined some formative processes at work in the varying relationship between Faulkner and the reader of his books, my focus will now shift to ways in which we can see such traits within Yoknapatawpha itself. In Part Three, I shall consider various figures within the fiction whose roles can be equated with notions of readership. Here, I shall concentrate on certain characters whose attitudes, deeds and reputations are intrinsically linked with images of the South, whether as establishing motifs or as representative of the need to relate to the already "written" local environment, and the methods by which these are perpetuated into the regional and fictional context. Of course, the world of the Yoknapatawpha series is one "written" by every one of its inhabitants, as I hope ultimately to show in this study, and, as should also become clear, the concepts of "reading" and "writing" cannot be treated fairly in isolation from each other, as they are very often part of the same creative process. This said, it is helpful to identify and consider the careers of certain figures who can be said to assert a tangible influence on the lives of the people around them and on the county's wider physical and psychological geography, as well as their reasons for doing so and the ramifications both for themselves and for those who may try to "read" them. Their writings, as such, vary greatly, and in this context we can look fruitfully at anything from bite-marks in a pipe-stem, to the attempted creation of a dynasty, to the almost complete domination of Jefferson's economy. What links them is their contribution or response to Yoknapatawpha's sense of itself, and by implication that of the South at large.

Following a brief discussion of John Sartoris, I will concentrate mainly on two especially indicative figures, each colossal in their respective phases of Yoknapatawpha's history. In their very different ways, Thomas Sutpen and

Flem Snopes impose themselves on society, either through rigid adherence to a "design" or a more subtle campaign of calculated infiltration and domination. As such, while they are no more or less a part of the Yoknapatawpha landscape than any of their fellow countrymen and women, they become emblematic of certain elements of its make-up, both self-consciously through their own actions (especially in the case of Sutpen), and pointedly through the presentation of them in the fiction. Even more importantly, they are shown to be fundamentally involved in the construction of their own destinies, each in their different ways forging definitive roles for themselves and others within an already stylised and constructed environment. Of course, much of what we can say about these people and their lives and effects is highly dependent upon their reception, not least as deliberately exploited by Faulkner as a motivating force in the novels themselves; however, discussion of this side of Faulkner's southern dialogic will, for the most part, come in the chapters comprising Part Three. Here, I will concentrate primarily on the authorial roles of Sartoris, Sutpen and Snopes themselves: their use and manipulation of the mythology of which they are inevitably a part, how they write their particular chapters in the Yoknapatawpha saga. Through the discussion here, and the corresponding consideration of some of Yoknapatawpha's prominent readers to come, I hope to illuminate how and to what extent various writers and readers are involved in the production of texts *within* the greater system of texts co-produced by Faulkner and the reader, as discussed previously. From this, we should be able to consider and compare the roles of readers and writers in the "actual" world and within the created world of the series, and go on to discuss the crucial interrelationships between them as fundamental to the scale of the Yoknapatawpha achievement.

Chapter Three

Doing Things Bigger Than He Was: John Sartoris

Before going on to examine Sutpen and Snopes, two men who effectively write their way into the fabric of the county, it is worth examining briefly one of their most important precursors (and in Sutpen's case, contemporaries), both in terms of his standing as patriarchal figurehead of one of the old pseudo-aristocratic ruling families of Jefferson—which Sutpen attempts to emulate and Snopes to undermine and dethrone—and to show how even this position is, to a great extent, a contrivance. Colonel John Sartoris looms large over Yoknapatawpha's physical and psychological landscape: Civil War hero, plantation- and slave-owner, man of action, politician, he is in every way a Southern legend, with all the trappings from splendid mansion to violent death and ostentatious mausoleum. It is also his fate to be the looming shade over two of the less notable books (all things being relative) from the earlier half of Faulkner's career, *Sartoris,* the first Yoknapatawpha novel, and *The Unvanquished,* but his importance as a character and as the aforementioned legend both gives these books much of their power and ensures his vitality far beyond their individual boundaries. It is arguable, in fact, to what extent he ever transcends his legendary status, for readers both in and of the fiction; like many of Faulkner's most powerful and convincing characters (not least Sutpen), he is "absent" from the texts that revolve around him, at least in any direct form. He is never presented directly to the reader either by an authorial voice or through the kind of mental transcription we have seen in *The Sound and the Fury,* but mediated through the collective memory of his family and circle via the authorial voice in *Sartoris* and the anecdotal tall-tale-reminiscences of his son Bayard in *The Unvanquished.* None of which, in the Yoknapatawphan tradition, makes him any less potent a force; quite the opposite, in fact. Indeed, it is largely through this textual absence that his

potency is allowed to develop: vitally, this is the case for characters as well as the reader. The very first image of the Yoknapatawpha series (in terms of its publishing history) is a summoning up of John Sartoris:

> As usual, old man Falls had brought John Sartoris into the room with him. . . . Freed as he was of time and flesh, he was a far more palpable presence than either of the two old men. . . . cemented by a common deafness to a dead period and so drawn thin by the slow attenuation of days; even now, although old man Falls had departed to tramp the three miles back to that which he now called home, John Sartoris seemed to loom still in the room, above and about his son, with his bearded, hawklike face, so that as old Bayard sat . . . holding the pipe in his hand, it seemed to him that he could hear his father's breathing even, as though that other were so much more palpable than mere transiently articulated clay as to even penetrate into the uttermost citadel of silence in which his son lived.[1]

Through his very presence, Falls brings Sartoris into the room, and the Colonel has a power greater than either of the two living men can possess, many years after his death. The suggestion is, though, that Sartoris maintains a tangible existence even after the old man's departure, living on both in his son's perception and in the bite-marks in the old pipe, "where he had left the very print of his ineradicable bones as though in enduring stone . . ."[2] Thus, the account of this apocryphal county begins with some of the images and concerns that will most crucially dominate it over the books and years to come. Yoknapatawpha, it is suggested at this opening stage, is peopled as much by the "palpable presence" of its past inhabitants as by their living descendants, who through the very acts of continuing to live and interact—or indeed brood in solitude—inevitably and perpetually provide the forum for their forbears to continue writing. This writing is both psychological and physical, as we see here on a small scale and in ever-increasing magnitude as the series continues. The material imprint of Sartoris's teeth is a vivid continuation of his influence; that its poignancy is largely the result of Bayard's relation to it does not diminish its own intrinsic vitality. The bite-marks are the first of many written texts we are to see, and Bayard's readership of them is, likewise, a prelude to the receptive mass or network that is so prominent a part of the landscape.

Despite the delicacy and scale of the bite-marks, it is their certainty that is most striking, their air of authority beyond their physical being. The young Bayard's observation, in *The Unvanquished,* of his father's "doing

things bigger than he was"[3] has resonance here as much as for Sartoris's greatest physical feat: the railroad. The railroad is the Colonel's means of linking Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha with the rest of Mississippi and ultimately the rest of America, but it is also, and perhaps more importantly, his way of ensuring his own immortality. In bequeathing such a massive physical and psychological element of the local environment, Sartoris is equating himself with Yoknapatawphan glory, inscribing himself upon the landscape with the confidence of a man firm in his self-belief. (What becomes of the railroad, and what this says about Sartoris's legacy, will be discussed in relation to the "writings" of Sutpen and Snopes.) The importance of his father's self-invention is not lost on Bayard, and nor is its sheer physicality: indeed, it is this that manages to save the romanticism inevitably surrounding Sartoris from stereotype, even as portrayed by his twelve-year-old son—the Colonel, to quote Cleanth Brooks, "is not a paper paladin: he is a portion of sweating humanity."[4] Sartoris's activity is impressive on its own dubious terms: we see him working on the plantation to keep it functioning during the war, hijacking an election and shooting the Northern "carpetbaggers," capturing a Yankee patrol with the authorial and triumphantly signatory "Boys, I'm John Sartoris, and I reckon I've got you."[5]

The larger-than-life statue on his flamboyant mausoleum marks the point at which the Sartoris myth realises itself, when his deeds have all been done and his contingent life can no longer threaten or limit his position as self-appointed legend, "as though he had but waited for [his death] to release him from the clumsy cluttering of bones and breath, by losing the frustration of his own flesh he could now stiffen and shape that which sprang from him into the fatal semblance of his dream . . ."[6] The signs that have constituted his life become the signifiers of the Sartoris metalanguage, to appropriate Roland Barthes, freed of contingency and omnipresent in the lives of the descendants he leaves behind in the corporeal world. Even more than his activity and physical manifestations in life, his "deification" in death keeps both the name and the legend of Sartoris writ large on the psychological landscape of Yoknapatawpha. It is as though, in death, he has fulfilled the criteria required and can properly claim his due stature.

Much of both *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished* consist of people's attempts to respond or come to terms with the text that the Colonel has written; while the reception of his writings will be dealt more fully later on, it is worth noting here the apparent finality and completeness of the John Sartoris myth. Unlike, for instance, Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!,* Sartoris's person and story are not subject to constant and necessary retelling and consequent narrative reconstruction; the various lives of those most

affected by him are largely dominated by their reading of the myth as it is and the consequences of their complex acceptance or abjuration of it, but they are, crucially, not involved in its writing. In short, Sartoris (and, indeed, *Sartoris*) is effectively a more *readerly* text than some of those we are to encounter as we read through the series, more in line with the "classic" mode of writing that Barthes identifies negatively.[7] Undoubtedly, some of this is due to Faulkner's own relationship with the reader in the novels that most fully involve Sartoris, in relation to the issues discussed in Part One, but it is telling that it seems largely so for the Colonel's readers *within* the books. Much as their lives are dominated by their relationship to the legend of their great ancestor, the stories of, in particular, the older and younger Bayards are really responses to and versions of it, rather than a continuation of the writing. The deeds and attitudes of the individual family members will always be assessed, by themselves and others, in terms of their adherence or otherwise to the modes of behaviour expected of them. The past as presented here is a dominant, imposing, but closed world that continues to write but is itself unwritable.

Chapter Four

That Florid, Swaggering Gesture: Thomas Sutpen

If we can discern a significant level of contrivance in John Sartoris's career, then this is taken to unmanageable extremes in that of his contemporary Thomas Sutpen, on every level from his own childhood resolve to write his way into the South's aristocratic fabric to the conscious development—or dissolution—of his story into a living, breathing, and very interactive literary work on every narrative layer. The processes of self-creation, and the reverberations that continue through the years and generations following Sutpen's life, are that bit more extreme because, in effect, more achievement is needed if anything is to be achieved at all, and nobody is more aware of this than Sutpen himself. Whereas his eventual neighbours such as Sartoris are entrenched in their social and economic situations, Sutpen literally has to make his own from scratch; the paradoxical result of his undeniably hard work, however, is its necessary invalidity in its own context. In his Gatsby-like attempt to define his own life along the very lines that would seem to be in place to suppress it, his odyssey tackles face-on the apparently pre-destined stratification of nineteenth-century Southern life, exposing the inherent lack of workability that will eventually lead to its undermining by the likes of Flem Snopes. Part of what makes his story, and of course *Absalom, Absalom!,* so central to the Yoknapatawpha saga is that it is effectively a drama of the South destroying itself, worked out on both microcosmic and epic stages. Crucially, this drama can be read as a network of conflicts of writers and readers: Sutpen's engagement with what he perceives to be his designated lot in life fires his transformation into its painfully intertwined antithesis, and his explosion onto the Yoknapatawpha scene throws up a seemingly infinite set of self-defining and self-destroying factors that necessarily refuse to become subject to any individual reading. Here, I shall discuss the extent to

which the nature of Sutpen's rise and fall can be attributed to his own efforts as a Yoknapatawpha writer, and will also consider if and how this can be reconciled with the particular brand of determinism that can be attributed to him.

As we shall see more fully in Part Three, Sutpen's story, more than that of any other character in the Faulknerian canon, is constantly and from the very beginning subject to the effects of multiple layering of narrative, leading to seemingly endless permutations and possibilities as to its motives and meanings. This, of course, makes it dangerous to assert anything at all about him, a danger which is itself dramatised within the text of *Absalom, Absalom!* However, we can say that all the narrators and commentators, whether actual or implied, agree on one thing: the contrived nature of his standing in Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha. Even more than Sartoris's "doing things bigger than he was," Sutpen always seems consciously to be projecting a certain conception of himself, one intended to be read in a certain way. Some of the parallels with Sartoris are clear: where the latter is perceived by his son Bayard as deriving much of his physical magnitude from the stature he gains while riding, Sutpen is described very early on by the authorial voice as "a man who contrived somehow to swagger even on a horse,"[1] a description that neatly comments upon both the extent of his role-playing and the fact that it is a role he is deliberately appropriating. Later, such visual manifestations of Sutpen's assumption of elite status are more fully addressed by Mr Compson, after his father:

> . . . and he saluted them with that florid, swaggering gesture to the hat (yes, he was underbred. It showed like this always, your grandfather said, in all his formal contacts with people. He was like John L. Sullivan having taught himself painfully and tediously to do the schottische, having drilled himself and drilled himself in secret until he now believed it no longer necessary to count the music's beat, say. He may have believed that your grandfather or Judge Benbow might have done it a little more effortlessly than he, but he would not have believed that anyone could have beat him in knowing when to do it and how. And besides, it was in his face; that was where his power lay, your grandfather said: that anyone could look at him and say, *Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything*)."[2]

So, Sutpen's closest and possibly only friend within the social strata that he has trained himself so diligently to join is alert to the level of invention behind his membership—this, it is worth remembering, is before we have encountered any of the narrative that will suggest the true extent of Sutpen's

social climbing. Sutpen is taking a set of rituals and modes of behaviour that is already imbued with a sense of performance—which will be judged—and playing it by numbers. In his hands it is a role studied, considered and practised, rather than a matter of inherited bluster; in a sense, its very lack of genuine foundation—in the social terms of the day, at least—gives it a disconcertingly *real* quality. On his own terms, he has earned himself the right to make such "florid, swaggering gesture[s]," and manages to belie his "underbreeding" through the conviction he brings to what is essentially an empty practice. Rather than just reading the behaviour of the upper class, from the original planter whose vicariously performed arrogance sets him on his way to the Jefferson elite whom he comes to overshadow, he rewrites it with the fervour of the born-again.[3] The deepest "power" that General Compson sees is actually Sutpen's ability not only to "*do anything,*" but to do it bigger and better than those who would presume the right to do so through heredity and the status quo. And this includes, of course, the magnitude of his failure.

Sutpen is larger than life: textually, in that he manages to escape all attempts to read his life, and socially, in that he acquires the trappings and manner and lifestyle of the planting class, but *more so.* Just as the hat-gesture is testament to a certain background might, so the economic and symbolic infrastructure around which he builds his Yoknapatawpha prominence somehow transcends the precedents. His plantation, Sutpen's Hundred, dwarfs its neighbours: even during its construction, he "lived in the Spartan shell of the largest edifice in the county, not excepting the courthouse itself . . ."[4] Sutpen is building himself up to be bigger than the town of Jefferson, bigger than its laws and traditions, both moral and practical. In some ways, his rise in Yoknapatawpha society can be seen as an almost cartoonish exaggeration of the models he finds there, were his intent not so deadly serious and the consequences so far-reaching. He takes on the facets of the Southern aristocrat and supersedes them. As well as having the biggest house and plantation, the largest number of slaves and the most florid and swaggering of gestures, he rises from second-in-command to none other than John Sartoris in their Civil War regiment to replace Sartoris as Colonel, probably the most literal and explicit example of his beating the "old order" at their own game. In his early days in Yoknapatawpha, Sutpen hosts his own version of the hunt, that staple of society life: but whereas his contemporaries, the "real" gentry, have as their quarry foxes and bears, Sutpen's party is engaged in a manhunt. It is as though he is making an artist's impression of how these people would act if their actions and motives actually meant something; next to the heroic gravitas and magnitude of Sutpen's quest, the trifles of Jefferson's leaders, ostensibly doing

the same, do tend to look rather like a game, a game for which the newcomer has learned the rules only to rewrite them to accommodate his own impassioned dominance.

Of course, Sutpen is not adhering to all the rules, or even to any of them in the strict sense. Staying with the image of Sutpen's dynasty as an artist's representation of the ultimate Southern plantation lifestyle, we might refer to Mikhail Bakhtin as a means of understanding the structures and tensions involved. Bakhtin's emphasis, in the following extracts, is linguistic, but it is easy to substitute the situation surrounding Sutpen's engagement with Yoknapatawpha plantation lore:

> . . . any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist—or, on the contrary, by the "light" of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents.
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> . . .
>
> The way in which the word conceives its object is complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of its socio-verbal intelligibility. And an artistic representation, an "image" of the object, may be penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are interwoven in it; such an image need not stifle these forces, but on the contrary may activate and organize them.[5]

If we look at Sutpen's Hundred as an artist's impression of the more "properly" established plantation system, it is indeed subject to the conditions that Bakhtin discusses here. Sutpen's object is, of course, a highly qualified one, rooted in Southern traditions and thereby laden with overwhelming cultural baggage that the "image"—Sutpen's Hundred—cannot help but be informed by, and which it, in turn, "activates and organises" into the conflicts and tensions that arise between Sutpen and the original planter class of Jefferson. To appropriate Bakhtin again, the "real" world of Jefferson and the "represented" one constituted by Sutpen's Hundred are in

> . . . continual mutual interaction. . . . The work and the world represented within it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers.[6]

As an *impression* of a social mode, Sutpen's "work" necessarily has a different set of precepts to those of his fellow planters, and these undeniable forces work, interact and clash to bring about the peculiar situation regarding his standing and fate. We might say that neither party consciously thinks this through, but the juxtaposition of what are seen as time-honoured traditions[7] and their violent appropriation by the self-invented Sutpen in the form of what would appear to be the same—if exaggerated—set of social accoutrements changes forever the experiences of both, and indeed informs both from the beginning of their tortuous relationship. What could be seen as an almost conservative desire to become part of the status quo necessarily undermines it, and underneath all the surface conventionality of Sutpen's position as an overlord of Yoknapatawpha is the vast web of ambiguity that nearly a century of interpretation (and this just within *Absalom, Absalom!* itself) cannot untangle. One might say that the arrogance implied in the position of a Sartoris, or indeed that of Sutpen's original role-model/antagonist as a child, is dependent to a large degree upon a lack of ambiguity, a certainty of right to elite status, as much as anything deriving from the proven track-record of heredity. Despite the undoubted hard work of Sartoris, for instance, his is nonetheless a position gained through family background (or so he would have us believe). Vitally, it is also *seen* to be the case, which we might cite as a principal reason for Sutpen's eventual demise in Yoknapatawpha, as we shall see.

Viewing Sutpen as a writer of the plantation system of nineteenth-century Yoknapatawpha allows us to consider a long-running critical debate in a new light, which in itself will have an interesting bearing on our reading—that of the extent to which he can be considered "representative" of his region, class and historical period: put bluntly, how *Southern* is Sutpen? The prevalent understanding has been that "in the story of a design that failed we may read the meaning of the decline of the South,"[8] and its epic narrative scale as much as its nature certainly tempts one to read Sutpen's tumultuous rise and fall in broadly social terms. While not all proponents of an emblematic Southern Sutpen necessarily go as far as Ilse Dusoir Lind in saying that "Sutpen is the very incarnation of the Old South,"[9] it is frequently argued that his tragedy is read most productively as that of his region. Olga W. Vickery, in one of the earliest important book-length studies of Faulkner's career, asserts that

> Sutpen himself is a mirror image of the South, for his career in Jefferson merely repeats in a foreshortened form the rise of many families whose longer tenure of the land has given them respectability. Through his single-minded preoccupation with the "design," he effects consciously and

> in the span of a few years what other Southern families accomplished over a period of generations. But whereas he is far from being a special case, he is definitely an anachronism: he is the ruthless and purposeful founding father of a dynasty who lives in a time of consolidation rather than of expansion. Time proves his worst enemy, for not only has it established the social hierarchy of the Sartorises and Compsons, but it has limited the time he can devote to creating even the rudiments of a similar structure for his family. Because he lacks a past while trying to recreate the past of the South, the townspeople regard him with distrust, then hatred, and finally with an exacted tolerance.[10]

While nowhere near so absolute as Lind's appraisal, Vickery here firmly asserts the importance of viewing Sutpen in terms of Southern society, the idea of a "mirror image" just about saving the argument from self-contradiction. For while pointing to the overall "Southernness" of Sutpen's goals and efforts, Vickery pertinently notes his lack of a plantation foundation upon which to build his dynasty, a fatal obstacle to the design's realisation. Sutpen becomes the Southern planter *extraordinaire,* but without the necessary credentials to do so—he is a living paradox of too much too soon too late, whose life serves to "reflect" that around him. Despite Vickery's careful commentary on Sutpen's tortuous relationship with time, he is still understood here as, if not an archetype, then at least a facet of the very psyche of the South.

However, many of the same criteria are used by another of Faulkner's most prominent early critics, Cleanth Brooks, to assert quite the opposite: that, far from typifying the Southern aristocracy, Sutpen actually represents much of what could be considered its antithesis.[11] Referring, like Vickery, to Sutpen's lack of a past in relation to his neighbours, Brooks claims that

> . . . Sutpen's manners indicate his abstract approach to the whole matter of living. Sutpen would seize upon "the traditional" as a pure abstraction—which, of course, is to deny its very meaning. For him the tradition is not a way of life "handed down" or "transmitted" from the community, past and present, to the individual nurtured by it. It is an assortment of things to be possessed, not a manner of living that embodies certain values and determines men's conduct. The fetish objects are to be gained by sheer ruthless efficiency. (Sutpen even refers to "my schedule.")[12]

In typically painstaking fashion, Brooks develops this very clear-sighted basis into a deconstruction of Sutpen-as-Southerner, citing example after example

of his behaviour to demonstrate that under the Southern guise there is actually a man of more conventionally "American" principles and actions: in particular, the "sheer ruthless efficiency" and "schedule" has obvious Franklin (not to mention Gatsby[13]) associations. Sutpen's "fetishistic" adherence to his design often wears the guise of a Southern sensibility, but this belies its more "rational" framework. His refusal to acknowledge Charles Bon as his son, for instance, is not because of the latter's mixed blood—Clytie is evidence of the comparative unimportance of this, according to Brooks—but because he endangers the design; the racism of Sutpen's position is more an affectation than a deeply-rooted feeling. The Southern accoutrements that Sutpen surrounds himself with are all examples of his plundering a tradition that is not his: his choice of wife is determined by her "respectability," but "[f]or Sutpen, respectability is an abstraction like morality: you measure out so many cups of concentrated respectability to sweeten so many measures of disrespectability—'like the ingredients of pie or cake.'"[14] Brooks points out the strong irony in the ferocity with which Sutpen must work in order to attempt a lifestyle of leisure, which we seldom see him enjoying; he displays the unflagging diligence of the strongest adherent of a Protestant work ethic, and all to attain its opposite. Most convincingly, Brooks cites at length the work of historians Eugene Genovese and C. Vann Woodward to show Sutpen's antipathy towards central tenets of the Southern planter ideal, most importantly the "paternalism" seen to be central to a plantation dynasty: Sutpen's sons, says Brooks, "seem to have no more emotional relation to Sutpen than pieces in a chess game. They are, to be sure, the most important pieces on his board, and he plays them with all the cool detachment at his command . . ."[15] Brooks links this with Sutpen's rationalistic, "American" innocence (an issue I will examine more fully in due course): he has trained himself in the mechanics of Southern society, but he remains forever innocent of the passions and humanity that are an essential and integral part of any successfully—or otherwise—functioning group of individuals, of the fact that his actions bear responsibility in any way to anything other than his own cold, obsessive rationality. The extremity of his appropriation and perversion of Southern values and modes of behaviour in itself sets him apart from those he seeks to emulate and transcend:

> Sutpen, possessed by an almost malignant demon of abstraction, is a shocking figure, but, we must remember, he also shocks his Yoknapatawpha neighbors. We naturally expect him to treat his slaves as things "adjunctive" to his design, but so does he treat his own children. He does not exemplify the paternalism that Genovese finds to be typical of

> the Southern planter. Paternalism, of course, can be cruel. History and literature abound in overbearing fathers. But Sutpen's treatment of other human beings, including his own flesh and blood, is something else. His ruthless acts are not the occasional outbursts of a choleric father but the calculated machinations of a man completely absorbed in his cold dream of self-vindication.[16]

In his fanatical bastardisation of Southern values, Sutpen takes them too far. He *makes* himself extraordinary, rather than merely being so in society's terms; far from "being driven to new evils by forces which antedate his birth and which are beyond the sphere of his conscious governing,"[17] he engineers his own fate. In effect, he makes himself too Southern to be true.

There is much to be said for both these broad readings of Sutpen's life, each of which taken singly has a profound effect on our understanding of Sutpen's importance, and therefore of *Absalom, Absalom!* itself. The more generally accepted view takes Sutpen rather more on his own terms, taking its lead from the tonal suggestion of the novel, in which Quentin Compson clearly considers the Sutpen story to be part of his regional birthright,[18] and is therefore, perhaps, more useful in determining the effect of Sutpen on the Yoknapatawpha scene. Brooks is more incisive, claiming an antipathetic ideological basis as the site of Sutpen's relationship with society, and therefore granting him more autonomy as an individual (and individualist). However, both readings suffer from an unnecessarily simplistic isolation (while necessarily lacking in simplicity in themselves), setting up a false distinction and individually disregarding certain elements of Sutpen's life. Faulkner scholars have long confronted the issue, creating a dialogue from which we can gain a rich image of Sutpen. The most interesting are those arguments that allow for consideration of both the poles discussed, or whose overall direction may still suggest room for others. Eric Sundquist points out that however "representative" we may wish to find him, the "average planter" did not have his career defined in such as extreme manner,[19] before going on to make a compelling comparison between Sutpen and Abraham Lincoln. Sundquist balances W. J. Cash's view that the Southern "aristocrats" could not be properly called so due to their actual *lack* of heredity and their own frequent rise through the class system, with Genovese's pointing out that this was surely the basis of all such systems. James A. Snead calls Sutpen "a "carrier," a medium for messages he does not create or share,"[20] and claims that he is "the outsider made good, but outsider he remains. He embodies the falsity of an American rags-to-riches myth which claims [in Cleanth Brooks's words] that the 'social structure of the South has always been more fluid than outsiders suppose.'"[21] While ostensibly appearing to support the idea of an "American"

Sutpen, these views also allow for important "Southern" elements in his career, or at least suggest correlatives between the two.

Other writers are more critical of Brooks's angle, even if they do not engage with it directly. Richard H. King discusses Sutpen as one of Faulkner's "founders," and suggests that if "Thomas Sutpen is a geographical and social interloper . . . then so are all founding fathers."[22] To follow Brooks "allows the Southern tradition to escape a certain scrutiny,"[23] though King is careful to urge against seeing *Absalom, Absalom!* purely as a critique of the old South. It must not be forgotten that, despite the approbation he causes, Sutpen does not necessarily do his "founding" at such a temporal remove as his neighbours may wish to believe: his story must be considered part of the settling of the region, even if the ideology behind his actions differs from other such father figures. King makes an important link between the actions of such men as Sutpen and Sartoris and the will of the artist:

> As founders they assumed a certain amoral heroism and were beyond good and evil in any conventional sense. They were demiurges. But then so was the strong artist. Here we should remember that Faulkner labeled the map of Yoknapatawpha County as his: "William Faulkner, Sole Proprietor." This was an appropriately Sutpenian gesture and attached to *Absalom, Absalom!,* though undoubtedly with a touch of irony . . . [24]

This identification of such strong male figures' founding power as correlative to that of the artist, pointedly including Faulkner himself, is important in gauging the nature of their fundamental effect upon their environment. The parallels drawn here with the actions of his more established neighbours is telling: much of Sutpen's creation inevitably "represents a return of what Jefferson has repressed as a community,"[25] and his work threatens to undermine the sense of permanence the town's elite tries to project. We might also see this artist figure, though with a different emphasis, in Richard Godden's reading of Sutpen as a "labor lord," placing him as a key creator of the South's class system, progenitor of his "postbellum witnesses. I stress that, with the exception of Shreve, those who tell Sutpen's story are, in class terms, his inheritors . . ."[26]

One can easily see the "American" traits that Brooks identifies in Sutpen's character, as opposed to the more obviously "Southern" ones of his longer-established neighbours, but we must not disregard the Southern terms in which he is considered both by his contemporaries and his readers within the novel. On the most fundamental level, there is no inherent reason

to consider him as *either* "Southern" or "American," to take Brooks's distinction, for the simple reason that he can more profitably be seen as *both:* this is an uneasy and yet bleakly obvious duality which underlies Sutpen's identity, actions and motives. Of course, the ideological differences between the South and the North (or "America," as Brooks implicitly identifies it) in many ways transcend the geographical simultaneity of the South's position, especially when Brooks's Southern Agrarian bent is borne in mind. However, accepting Brooks's reading of Sutpen's "American" approach to his life, we can read the interplay between him and Yoknapatawpha as painful evidence of the uneasy coexistence of the two psyches in the work of the one man-as-writer. Furthermore, it is in this way that Sutpen's artistry most intricately highlights the network of fissures with which the South is blighted. By considering his role as an artist, a writer, we can form an idea of Sutpen that is inclusive of both spheres of argument, an idea that more fully represents the tensions within him and his world than either of these readings can in isolation. Philip M. Weinstein rightly identifies the conjunction of these apparently opposite impulses as central to Sutpen's life:

> The defeated Southern planter dream (Sutpen's design) joins with the American dream of self-creation (Sutpen's desire). These merge, rise into a credibility all the more touching for our foreknowledge of disaster, and collapse of their intrinsic flaws. The pathos of their undermining, repercussive, played out again and again, emerges as High Tragedy.[27]

Sutpen's life is one driven by paradox; therefore, it should not be assumed that he can only adhere to one or the other "side" of this debate. However "abstract" Sutpen's appropriation of plantation culture may seem (and I question this terminology), however little he may adhere to its implied ideologies beyond the requirements of his rationalistic design, it is this culture that he affects just as it undeniably affects him, following Bakhtin's notion of "continual mutual interaction." If Sutpen is an "American" alien in the South, then surely we must also recognise that his status, his "work" there serves to illuminate the geographical and ideological conflicts cleaving the country. He is never fully accepted as one of the Jefferson elite, and yet he surpasses all of them in the grandeur of both his success and his failure. He may work by atypical means, but his failure in social terms parallels that of the personal. To deny his "Southernness" is to deny an essential part of his tragedy as well as to oversimplify the nature of the society that Faulkner and his reader consider and Sutpen helps to define. This conflict in readings is a useful and illuminating backdrop to an examination of the artist's work and

motivations. Considering Sutpen as a Southern writer illuminates the false terms of the argument: Sutpen should not be discussed as a represent*ative* Southern planter, as both positions here do, but rather as a self-drawn represent*ation of* one, thereby allowing us to view all facets of his personality and career, and the light it sheds on the community at large.

In the truest sense, we cannot properly identify the point at which Sutpen could be said to start his massive process of self-creation, as our source for the story of his childhood and the early attempts to establish his "design" is Sutpen himself; we can never entirely escape the possibility that his greatest feat of writing is *this* creation of a scenario as told to General Compson during their hunt for the French architect. Indeed, as the readers of *Absalom, Absalom!,* we are not really told the story itself, as such, but rather its *telling,* which in its turn gives us the substance of the tale being told. Even Quentin's telling Shreve of Sutpen's background is couched wholly in terms of Sutpen's relating it to General Compson, not to mention the intermediary narration that has taken place in order to get it to Massachusetts in 1909:

> And I reckon Grandfather was saying "Wait, wait for God's sake wait" about like you are, until he finally did stop and back up and start over again with at least some regard for cause and effect even if none for logical sequence and continuity. . . . 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.[28]

Notwithstanding all the distorting narrative layers involved in the eventual relaying of Sutpen's early life to us—some of which we see, some of which is implied and continued in the reader's own mind—Sutpen's own directly authorial role is established here, not only in terms of his actual life but in its relaying into the public domain. We might say that he is apparently rather inefficient as a storyteller, necessitating enquiry and a need for order on the part of his audience—a role which, of course, continues down the line all the way to the reader of Faulkner's novel. It is important to note that the formative events of Sutpen's childhood, despite coming from the horse's mouth, are never related as any kind of fact but rather, in this manner, as a fireside yarn, joining the "rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking"[29] that constitute the Sutpen legend. What is more, this is a story highly contingent in

itself to the circumstances of its telling: as with his Yoknapatawphan writings in life, Sutpen has little regard for the niceties of "logical sequence and continuity" of his tale. As a result the story is shaped by the machinations and instincts of the teller's mind as he tells it. For instance, he moves on to the episode of the Haitian slave-revolt seemingly by accident: "This anecdote was no deliberate continuation of the other one but was merely called to his mind by the picture of the niggers and torches in front of them."[30] Similarly, the tale stops when Sutpen decides that enough has been told for one night (and in the narrative present, Quentin reflects that it would take the thirty years it took Sutpen to tell it to do so properly, an indicator of how important, to Quentin at least, the process of storytelling is to the story). Furthermore, as Richard Godden has discussed, Sutpen's Haitian period constitutes a troubling anachronism: by the time he claims to have arrived there, slavery had long since ended, rendering the uprisings he suppresses an "unreadable revolution."[31] As well as the class- and race-related questions posed by Sutpen's narrative here, treated at valuable length by Godden, we are forced to recognise that empirical "truth" is never the motivating force—the suggestion is that the story creates its own, regardless of whether it is about Sutpen, "any man or no man." What this means, at root, is that the jungle of fictions that come to surround Sutpen is itself growing from what is more or less fiction in itself, however "true" his account may or may not be.

These rather important qualifications noted, Sutpen's account is the nearest to truth that we have, be it created or otherwise. And so, in terms of his story at least, we are in a similar position to the readers within the book: in order to come to any conclusions at all we have to take some things more or less on trust, whilst all the time being disturbingly aware that such an attitude has no real viability. Most of the story is not, of course, related by Sutpen himself, but in the context this does little to alter narrative reliability one way or the other. Even assuming that Sutpen's partial account is an accurate one, his authorship here is perhaps most powerful as a reminder, or indicator, of the extent to which he is responsible for his own destiny, notwithstanding its many outside influences, even down to the possible fictive creation of the circumstances from which he shapes it.

Sutpen's origins, as he describes them in the first instance, are the social opposite of the position he later comes to occupy. The product of a mountain family from what will eventually become West Virginia, there is an indeterminacy about his background that does provide a basis for self-creation, to a certain extent analogous to the "blank paper" quality that *Light in August*'s Joe Christmas might be said to have (though with rather different results). Despite the extreme poverty and simplicity of his family's lifestyle, there is an

air of pre-lapsarian innocence about them, with the kind of life they will soon encounter alien not only to their (lack of) experience but to their comprehension. As Noel Polk has discussed, ideas of land-ownership, social hierarchy and historical process do not feature in the young Sutpen's thinking;[32] these are corruptions that will come after his descent into the world of man. Innocent of place and society, Sutpen is also situated outside the regimented version of time: "he told Grandfather that he did not know within a year on either side just how old he was. So he knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why."[33] "Sutpen's trouble was innocence," says Quentin Compson;[34] it is also his making. His historical and social blankness leaves him fully vulnerable to the rigours of illumination, and makes his own lot—when he discovers that he apparently has one—all the more despicable in relation to those who would presume to determine his life.

Of course, at this stage he is innocent even of his innocence, rendering its perfection all the more dangerous in its collapse. With the event that will set his life on its idiosyncratic course—his encounter with the black butler at the planter's mansion—Sutpen is subjected to an injection of reality that he finds almost impossible to bear. Not only does he fully realise for the first time the sheer injustices of life, he is suddenly made aware at the same instant that he is not mentally attuned for such a discovery: his innocence has left him prone, a vulnerability that fuels his determination to rid himself of it:

> Because he was not mad. He insisted on that to Grandfather. He was just thinking, because he knew that something would have to be done about it; he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life and he could not decide what it was because of that innocence which he had just discovered he had, which (the innocence, not the man, the tradition) he would have to compete with.[35]

So, despite the shattering affront that he has just suffered at the hands of the plantation-owner, he is disgusted with his own position, rather than with the man who would presume to keep him in it. Specifically, he sees now for the first time the innocence from which he has apparently sprung, which, undiscovered, would presumably let him rot in his social mire, below even the slaves with whom his father amuses himself by beating. It is the *anti*-tradition, which he perceives himself to enshrine, that he must fight, not the oppressive tradition itself: this is not, to quote John T. Irwin, "revenge against [the] system . . . but against the luck of birth. . . . Henceforth he will

no longer receive the affront, he will deliver it."[36] As King discusses, this represents nothing less than an attempt to humanise himself; as Sutpen comes to understand it, "[t]o be human is to be recognized by others as master, as not-toiling."[37] Between this realisation and his eventual death at the hands of Wash Jones—a representative of the white underclass that has spawned Sutpen himself—and beyond, Thomas Sutpen writes the grand Southern text that he hopes will "compete" with his previous state of innocence, but which, of course, creates its own parameters of innocence and corruption. In his appropriation of the old order as he sees it, he and those who respond to it create their own, one whose paradoxically subversive determinism replaces the destiny apparently apportioned to him with a self-ordained and ultimately self-destroying fervour.

All this must put into perspective Cleanth Brooks's identification of Sutpen's "abstract approach" to the traditions with which he engages, a reading which would seem to imply an utter detachment from them. However "coldly" we may see Sutpen's attitudes towards the design's human and ideological components, his relationship to "the tradition" is surely far from one of "pure abstraction." True, he certainly does not "inherit" the code and values of his region in the way that a Sartoris or a Compson has had them "handed down" or "transmitted" over the generations:[38] his induction into plantation ethics is far more violent. In the butler's closing of the mansion door, Sutpen literally has the tradition shoved in his face; far from being "nurtured" by it, he is sharply upbraided, receiving the full impact of its significance in one terrible instant, an education his later contemporaries have received through life. As Sutpen achieves relatively swiftly what others have done more gradually, so is the design founded on the same principle—an unmanageable injection of cultural and historical codes and models into one rendered vulnerable by "innocence," which, distilled and fermented into a stronger and more terrible form, is then forced upon the very society that cruelly administered the initial overdose. Sutpen's relationship to and manipulation of the tradition may not be of the same nature as that of his neighbours, but it is not, at its core and inception, a matter of abstraction.

Sutpen is as much a product of the South and its values as his neighbours; the vital difference is that he acts as a *dynamic* focus for its machinations, a dynamism that he transfers into his own writing of his environment. If he brings an "American innocence" to his Southern epic, it is as a springboard from which to launch into his processes of creation. As Brooks and many other commentators—not least Quentin Compson—have commented, Sutpen's innocence is always a dominant facet of his psyche, but just as nothing else remains static about the man, neither does this. His original

boyhood innocence, of course, is destroyed at its realisation as the door is shut in his face; what is identified through his career is of a different kind but of equally monstrous effect: an innocence of the humanity that lies behind systems.[39] In creating his work of art, his Sutpen's Hundred and all its incumbent lives, the plantation-writer brings into being a world *without* life in all its full meaning—or, alternatively, he brings about a way of living, defined by a cruel innocence, that throws into focus the hollowness of the world around him while being chronically disabled by its own lack of foundation in the terms of that world. In writing Sutpen's Hundred, Thomas Sutpen throws Yoknapatawpha into a turmoil founded on, if not a shattering of its own innocence, then a confusion as to its own dubious viability. If Sutpen papers over the human elements of the plantation ideal in his version of it through excess of will and wealth, then he also forces back open the mansion's front door and strips the comforting paper off society's own walls. "Work" and "real world" mutually interact in a war of paradoxically intertwined polarities that nobody can win.

Through all of this we must not forget that such "innocence"—or culpability, depending on one's understanding of it—is couched in the first instance on Sutpen's own terms: it is he who originally brings the idea of innocence into the design's narrative framework, and it is telling that he frames it effectively outside the constituent parameters of narrative itself. As Sutpen introduces it, the world of literal innocence from which he springs (or is pulled from) is one without conventional conceptions of time, place, selection, division—without, in fact, the ways in which we most fundamentally order our understanding of the world, the conceptual arena in which the writer posits his artistic creation. The force with which Sutpen rejects his previous state of innocence, his existence outside narrative, is manifested in the ferocity with which he pursues his design, frames his narrative, writes his contribution to the Yoknapatawpha tale. From being devoid of narrative purpose, he creates his own with an integrity that will accept no alternative or deviation. His adherence to his vision is uncompromising: on his discovery of his first wife's mixed blood, he knows that he could

> . . . let matters take the course which I know they will take and see my design complete itself quite normally and naturally and successfully to the public eye, yet to my own in such fashion as to be a mockery and a betrayal of that little boy who approached that door fifty years ago and was turned away, for whose vindication the whole plan was conceived and carried forward to the moment of this choice . . . [40]

The fact that his wife's racial heritage is so indiscernible as to have escaped even him until after their marriage, and would therefore be likely to similarly elude the general population, is irrelevant. Whatever the outward appearances, he cannot sanction any miscegenation in his official genealogy (Clytie, as the product of relations with one of his slaves, is outside this parameter, and thus poses no threat), and so wife and infant son are rejected. His "innocence" here is of the fact that one cannot do such things without there being effects, or that such effects are of any consequence, and this is indicative of his and the design's effect on society in general. Put crudely, Sutpen refuses to "sell out"—he will not dilute his vision to satiate public taste, even though in this instance the public is unaware of any supposed transgression.

This level of artistic integrity, this absolute adherence to his original vision in total disregard for the sensibilities of his audience, is the key to the sheer magnitude of Sutpen's achievement as well as his failure in social and, ultimately, personal terms. It gives him the energy required to wrest an estate and dynasty out of the swamp, but it also critically alienates him. For it is not to the plantation system itself that his efforts are so bound, but his artistic impression of it; he does not forsake his first marriage because it transgresses plantation etiquette, but because it compromises his design. In this instance the two are, at root, the same; in others, of course, they are not. The very fact that Sutpen has to have a design to end up with a plantation effectively renders him ineligible as a planter, while his obliviously unorthodox methods of reaching this position force his separation from the society that his work attempts to imitate. Like all acts of mimesis—and Faulkner's own reflections on the necessary failure of artistic endeavour, quoted in my opening chapter, come to mind—Sutpen's is imperfect in its execution, if perversely impressive in its ardour. It is his attention to the design rather than the plantation reality that allows him, compels him to continue doggedly, to restart its writing after the historical book-burning that is the Civil War, to gather together the faltering threads of his narrative and attempt to reinstate the power of its meaning. While his neighbours busy themselves organising Ku Klux Klan sects to rid the South of its allegedly modernising agents, Sutpen dedicates himself to rescuing Sutpen's Hundred, claiming "*that if every man in the South would do as he himself was doing, would see to the restoration of his own land, the general land and the South would save itself . . .*"[41] This, of course, is the sort of "American" impulse that Brooks correctly identifies, but it is also Sutpen's attempt physically to write his model of the pre-war South back into existence. More than ever, Sutpen's narrative is contrary to that of those whose image he is recreating; having had their parts largely written for them by the preceding generations, they are now continuing their war against

those with the temerity to question or challenge them—among whom Sutpen must himself number, for all his Southern accoutrements—hearkening back to a perceived golden age as opposed to Sutpen's attempts fictively to re-enact it.

As the writer is compromised by circumstance, so Sutpen is forced into pursuing his authorial goals via straitened means, reduced eventually to drunken monologues in his compensatory country store, and attempting to restart his mimetic dynasty by seducing the fifteen-year-old granddaughter of his retainer, Wash Jones. His callous casting aside of Milly and their baby girl in favour of the more pressing needs of his mare's new colt is the most vivid example of the extent to which he is ruled by the design; a daughter cannot continue his name, and is therefore of no consequence at this late stage in his life where the deadline for completion approaches. In this most extreme dismissal of his audience's sensibilities, it is the devastated Jones that takes umbrage, leading to the most damaging critical backlash of all: Wash's brutal murder of Sutpen, his own granddaughter and newly-born great-granddaughter, and his suicidal rush at those he perceives to be of Sutpen's type that ends in his own destruction. And so Sutpen's work reaches its nadir: having soared to the heights of supreme local dominance, it eventually collapses completely into a violent confirmation of the class conflict that no amount of "self-improvement" can efface. The very type of man that Sutpen would normally have been expected to have become ends up cutting him down—the return of the repressed, as King notes.[42] The author has lost control of his text, largely through his lifelong failure to realise that his readership's role in it is at least as important as his own. This bloodbath in a desolate corner of a ruined plantation marks the end of his personal, direct writing of Yoknapatawpha life, but his work continues to inform the "real world" in ever more painful ways.

The eventual living embodiment of Sutpen's odyssey, of course, is the half-mad, mixed-race Jim Bond, the grandson of Charles Bon, who even at the narrative present is presumed to be out there somewhere in the wilds of Mississippi: the last bequest of Thomas Sutpen to Yoknapatawpha County, so far removed from the intended result of his fiction. Jim Bond is an example of the wasted humanity that Sutpen has produced as part of his inhuman design—he is an unwanted, unforeseen by-product, but for all this he is *human,* he has a human importance that has no place in the design, the work, but which inevitably informs both it and the world. The same can be said for Sutpen's more valued progeny, for they too only have worth insofar as they further his narrative drive; as far as Sutpen, their ultimate father-figure, is concerned, they have no humanity—they are merely plot devices, literary vehicles. But of course they *do* have lives of their own, and they do bear

relation to the world to which they are supposed merely to correspond: they are the living interaction of world and work that the authorial Sutpen has made no provision for, and they, long after their own deaths, have their continuing place in Yoknapatawpha County. Against the intentions of their creator (though with the full consent and complicity of William Faulkner and *his* readers) they make their own mark, that, like Sutpen himself, they have to live to make. And in this way, Sutpen's design has succeeded. To paraphrase his daughter Judith, he has left his mark on the stone, woven his pattern into the rug,[43] existentially *humanised* himself through art in a world that is structured effectively to muzzle that humanity. Indeed, he has inscribed the retrospective statement of intent "*I was here,*" that Faulkner himself held so central to the creative impulse, on the walls of Yoknapatawpha.[44] That his art denies those very impulses in others that inspired it in the first place is the primary reason for its failure on its own terms. It leaves behind a trail of real people who are inevitably compelled to feel the same sense of tortured futility and either intentionally or otherwise do something about it. It may be a shattered and painful version of it, but the ultimate product of the interaction of Sutpen's work and the world that it imitates is *life,* life that becomes and will always be a constituent part of the mental and physical manufacture of Yoknapatawpha County.

Chapter Five

Monuments and Footprints: The Mythology of Flem Snopes

Shortly before the murder of Flem Snopes, Gavin Stevens rushes across the town square to warn his long-time foe of his cousin Mink's release from Parchman jail. Gaining admission to the closed bank, Jefferson's most prominent lawyer and amateur romantic hero-cum-poet knocks "at the door on which Colonel Sartoris had had the word PRIVATE lettered by hand forty years ago," and enters:

> Snopes was sitting not at the desk but with his back to it, facing the cold now empty fireplace, his feet raised and crossed against the same heel scratches whose initial inscribing Colonel Sartoris had begun. He was not reading, he was not doing anything: just sitting there with his black planter's hat on, his lower jaw moving faintly and steadily as though he were chewing something, which as the town knew also he was not . . . [1]

Placed towards the end of *The Mansion,* Faulkner's penultimate novel and the final instalment of the Snopes trilogy, this image provides an intriguing balance to the opening scene of the first Yoknapatawpha book, *Sartoris,* discussed earlier, wherein "Colonel" Bayard Sartoris sits in this same office contemplating the bite-marks on his late father's pipe. Bearing in mind the implied heredity with which that earlier scene is imbued, Flem Snopes's occupation of the central role at this point very close to the emotional climax of the whole saga is indicative both of the extent and nature of his own rise, and the degree to which the fabric of Yoknapatawpha can be said to have altered, in the intervening years.[2] Flem has risen from being the overalled son of an itinerant share-cropper to become Jefferson's leading citizen, having transgressed in the process upon the pointedly inscribed "PRIVATE" domain

of the very class whose barns his father (allegedly) used to burn, to add his own "heel scratches" to theirs. This scene comes, of course, almost at the end of his career—all that is left to come is his brutal murder—but is indicative of his progress though this novel and the trilogy's previous instalments *The Hamlet* and *The Town.* As opposed to Thomas Sutpen's florid, swaggering, imitative gestures, Flem's journey to dominance has been one of insidious infiltration and usurpation of codes and positions already ingrained in the local psyche, his wealth achieved through the careful monopolisation of the county's prime economic machinery—through which the likes of the Sartorises and what is left of the Compsons, in the darkly laughable form of Jason, are finally undermined on their own terms. At this late stage, it is clear that there is little that is original about Flem's victory: he has adopted all the trappings of those he has displaced, even down to the planter's hat now wholly removed from its traditional context but representing a similar degree of power. What is important is the way in which it is achieved, and the differences from but also the similarities with those who have come before him. Rather than create his own version of an existing model, an artist's impression like Sutpen's Hundred that can never perfectly imitate its contemporaries, he has disposed of the need for mimesis by writing his way into the very institutions that constitute the original—de Spain's mansion, Sartoris's bank, and so on—to the extent that the very tenets of society that once seemed his opposite are now under his control and, like the hat, bereft of the meaning they once held, for better or for worse. This is implied in this particular scene by the fact that Flem is not reading in the office, which we might consider against Bayard's pained awareness and consideration of his father's continuing presence in the form of his bitten pipe. By contrast, Flem does not look for meaning, and as such traditional meaning is largely expelled from the position he occupies. This, as we shall see, is apparent throughout.

Even more than Thomas Sutpen, Flem is portrayed as a man from nowhere—though we know from *The Unvanquished,* as well as Ratliff's tales in *The Hamlet,* that the Snopeses have, in fact, been long resident in the region. This said, their presence in Yoknapatawpha has always been an unsettled one up to this point, their nomadic lifestyle movingly portrayed in the short story "Barn Burning" (which was originally written as the opening chapter of *The Hamlet,* eventually dropped in order to allow Flem to enter the novel, and trilogy, more prominently[3]). That story actually gives us the earliest appearance of Flem, as the unnamed older brother of the child Colonel Sartoris Snopes, who will soon become the first to "betray" and

desert the family. This slight appearance aside, Flem's first individual entrance into Yoknapatawpha's mental framework is his disquieting incursion into the consciousness of Jody Varner, who sees "suddenly . . . and without knowing when it had come there, a face beneath a gray cloth cap, the lower jaw moving steadily and rhythmically with a curious sidewise thrust, which even as he shouted 'Hello!' vanished again."[4] This strange introduction is intensified by being repeated even more disturbingly as Jody rides home:

> . . . he was travelling at a fair gait when he saw suddenly, leaning against a tree beside the road, the man whose face he had seen in the window of the house. One moment the road had been empty, the next moment the man stood there beside it, at the edge of a small copse—the same cloth cap, the same rhythmically chewing jaw materialised apparently out of nothing and almost abreast of the horse, with an air of the completely and purely accidental which Varner was to remember and speculate about only later.[5]

This seemingly mystical appearance is chilling, to Varner and to the reader, and goes unexplained and unexplored by the authorial voice. Flem is suggested to have come as if from nowhere, to appear in the Frenchman's Bend landscape as though he has formed out of the Yoknapatawpha air itself. Like Sutpen, he comes from somewhere that is somehow unquantifiable, the difference being that Sutpen's origins are distinctly *other,* whereas Flem, for all the impact he is soon to begin having, seems to arrive out of Yoknapatawpha's own shadows: this is quite the opposite of Sutpen's explosive entrance. This impression is crucial to an understanding of Flem, for it is his status as a product of the very environment he comes to dominate that lends his story its powerful sense of inevitability. This is not, however, to deny the "otherness" of Flem Snopes, even as he emerges from the local backdrop, for he seems immediately to change the scene of which he becomes so abruptly and yet definitively a part: a window in a ramshackle cabin or a quiet country road suddenly becomes something altogether more ominous through his apparently inexplicable presence. As with his appearance to Jody, Flem does little actually to change the fabric of Yoknapatawpha, but he does subtly change what much of it means; he is, in Richard Gray's words, "an agent of transformation that comes from within."[6] It is this double quality of strangeness coupled with an uncomfortable familiarity that compels the many readers within the trilogy continually to engage with him, as we shall see in Part Three.

Charles Mallison's oft-quoted assertion in the first chapter of *The Town* that Jefferson's water tower, now presided over by Flem Snopes, "was not a

monument: it was a footprint" provides a pertinent means of beginning to understand this effect. "A monument," Charles reasons, "only says *At least I got this far* while a footprint says *This is where I was when I moved again.*"[7] In a country so replete with monuments as Yoknapatawpha County, this is a significant point. Mansions, plantations, memorials, railroads: all stand as monuments to individual and Southern glory. Crucially, they also fall as such, as Faulkner's many examples of failed or sacked plantations and crumbling, burned, or lost houses amply demonstrate; and a fallen monument is as eloquent a statement as one standing. In fact, we might point to the very intransigence implied in the term "monument" as being central to the double-edged nature of its symbolism. In *standing,* in commemorating, it defines its own limit; it is essentially static, and therefore vulnerable to being torn down or subsumed. A footprint, however, as Charles suggests, is an indicator of motion, *progress,* an emblem not of something passed but rather of the passing. What is interesting in the application of this principle to Flem is that his career takes in many of these same objects, but in his hands they are indeed footprints—at least up to a point—rather than the monuments that they might have been considered as in previous hands: witness, for instance, Sutpen's use of many of the same elements and the effect and meaning they have both for him and for society. Flem ends up living in a mansion, having coerced himself into the ancestral seat of one of Jefferson's oldest families. He has by this stage also become a plantation overlord—though of a rather different kind to a Sartoris or, indeed, a Sutpen—through controlling the mortgages on the smallholdings that have been produced by the carving up of the old estates. The arrogant and extravagant tombstone that he erects over Eula's grave, as well as mocking his dead wife and daring the town to challenge him and expose its own hypocrisy, stands in juxtaposition with John Sartoris's mausoleum and, in its use of Italian marble, the folly of the overgrown graves of the Sutpens. Even Sartoris's railroad, which is "now a fading weed-grown branch line knowing no wheels any more save two local freight trains more or less every day" plays a vital part in Flem's career, in that his nemesis Mink uses it to make his way to end his life.[8] In Flem's hands, all these monuments to the pretension of the Old South (which are often even the same individual articles) become something else, powerful tools in his ascension (and, of course, his fall) rather than indicators of having previously ascended. We might note, indeed, that the original footprint of Charles Mallison's comment, the water tower for which a superintendentship has been created by Mayor de Spain for Flem, with its overtones of energy and process, is

somewhat more imposing than the backward-looking Confederate monument in the town square.

There are numerous other and perhaps more constructive examples of this process to be found in the course of Flem's life, often taking a less tangible form than something so apparently definite as a water tower or a mansion—this is especially so in the early stages described in *The Hamlet.* Flem's sole motivation is economic—the need to get rich—and accordingly his "footprints" are often such things as deeds of ownership, or the usurpation of a position in the country store or, indeed, the Sartoris bank. Indeed, he does not *build* the water tower or mansion, for instance, but insidiously assumes them, in stark contrast to Sutpen's literally wresting his equivalents out of the swamp. But before charting Flem's rise and fall in this way, we need to examine how "Snopesism," as Flem's effect or ethos is frequently termed in the trilogy, achieves this transformation of elements already long enshrined in the local environment and economy from "monuments" into "footprints," how he manages to rewrite the county's codes and processes and appropriate them into his own acquisitive project. In order to account for this constituting process of twentieth-century Yoknapatawpha, we can enlist the help of Roland Barthes and his use of Saussurian semiology to analyse the structures of myth.

In "Myth Today," the long essay that concludes *Mythologies,* Barthes discusses the processes and connotations enshrined in Saussure's seminal structuralist equation:

Signifier (e.g. rose) + Signified (passion) = Sign ("passionified" rose)[9]

Having asserted the importance of this principle, Barthes then goes on to analyse its development into language. When rendered into language, be it oral, written or, indeed, pictorial, Saussure's semiological system is extended into what Barthes terms a "second-order," wherein the *sign* of the first-order system now becomes the *signifier.* What is posited as "myth" is therefore a construct of two systems, identified by Barthes as the first-order "language-object" and the "metalanguage" of the second-order.[10] The *signifier* of the metalanguage is already laden with the contingent meaning it has brought over from its life as the language-object *sign;* upon entering the metalanguage as its *signifier* it takes on the mantle of form as well, pinning down the meaning, ridding it of its contingency: as Barthes puts it, "the form does not suppress the meaning, it only impoverishes it. . . . [I]t is a death with reprieve; the meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment."[11]

The metalinguistic *signified* (or concept) carries a more complex conceptual load than its language-object counterpart, for it is now both historical and determined:

> The concept reconstitutes a chain of causes and effects, motives and intentions. Unlike the form, the concept is in no way abstract: it is filled with a situation. . . . Truth to tell, what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality; in passing from the meaning to the form, the image loses some knowledge: the better to receive the knowledge in the concept. In actual fact, the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations. One must firmly stress this open character of the concept; it is not an abstract, purified essence; it is a formless, unstable, nebulous condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function.[12]

The necessarily linguistic nature of the myth's form renders the relationship between its underlying meaning and the concept one of "deformation."[13] The resulting equivalent of the *sign,* what Barthes terms the "*signification,*" is the myth itself, which is by this stage heavily subject to motivation, myth gaining its resonance from the relationship of its meaning and form. This being so, the only appropriate manner of reading myth is on its own terms, that is, considering it as "one inextricable whole made of meaning and form . . ."[14] The upshot of this whole process is the transformation of history into nature; the strength of myth depends on the reader's ability to consider it not as semiology but as an induction into a world.

The principles that Barthes discusses in his theories of myth-making are applicable in numerous ways to Faulkner, not least as regards acts of readership both of and within the Yoknapatawpha series, as we shall see in following chapters. Here, however, I want to apply the very process itself, with very little manipulation of terms, to Flem Snopes's career to show that, ruthless petty (and not-so-petty) capitalist though he may be, he is also a skilled and devastating maker of myths. In his assumption of so many of the county's monuments and significant institutions, Flem takes their meanings, themselves couched in myth, and transforms—or "deforms"—them into something else: broadly speaking, his effect upon Yoknapatawpha is to act out the processes of Barthes's myth-making to turn monuments into footprints. Taking the image of the mansion as the most visible emblem of the old order, we can construct a model informed by Saussure and Barthes, as well as Flem and Faulkner (or at least Charles Mallison) to illustrate the effects of Snopesism:

----------*language-object*----------						
SIGNIFIER	+ SIGNIFIED	= SIGN				
image	*concept*	*meaning*				
mansion	**+ aristocracy**	**= aristocratic mansion** (monument)	**+ Flem's triumph**	**= usurped dominance** (footprint)		
		form	*concept*	*signification (myth)*		
		SIGNIFIER	+ SIGNIFIED	= SIGN		
		----------*metalanguage*----------				

The mansion, in this example, that Flem engages with is already laden with its own individual history and a history intrinsic to what it symbolises about the nineteenth-century plantation South, encompassing or at the very least indicating all the aspects of what I have termed "aristocracy" here: slavery, plantation economics, heredity, and so on—as well as, in the local context, Thomas Sutpen's earlier "artist's impression" of the model. This is the "meaning" that is implied in it as the *sign* of the first-order semiological system. It is also very much a monument, a testament to the ideals and principles and practices it is intended to represent, as well as those very intentions themselves. This is the *sign* that Flem is to use in his deformation of the mansion to his own design.

In Flem's taking over the "aristocratic mansion," he applies his own, subtly different signified "concept" to it, beginning its transformation into myth (or, more properly, another type or stage of myth) and thereby turning it into the *signifier* of his metalanguage as well as the *sign* of his object, form as well as meaning. This laden form that he uses for his particular myth gives it much of its character, for it takes on the resonance of the meaning's "life" while necessarily "impoverishing" it through deformation. The meaning that the mansion represented is subjugated by the new "concept" that Flem applies—in this case the extent of his own rise through the echelons of Jefferson society—and the resulting *signification* is, therefore, a greatly different mansion. Flem's occupation dismisses the vitality of its previous meaning, while crucially co-opting its "value" into his own legend—the myth is all the more powerful because it contains in its very form elements of what it supersedes. Flem's entrance at the level of "motivation"—the nature of his intentions as regards deformation of the *sign* through the ramifications of his signified rise—forever changes the mansion, its status as *sign*(*ification*) now effectively an eviction (literally, here) of its equivalent status beforehand but simultaneously making pointed, barbed use of it for its full effect. Applying to this the terminology that Charles Mallison uses in *The Town,* we can see

that the mansion is indeed now a "footprint," with all the connotations of progress, movement, that that implies. Flem's very process of mythification is one of progress, of change: he takes something apparently fixed and deforms it into something else, thereby denying the monumental quality that it had previously assumed and using and adapting it to make his own mark.

Some qualification of this theoretical model for the mythical processes of Snopesism is required, which does not detract either from the theory itself or from the power of Flem's embodiment of it; rather, it further increases the complexity and viability of the forces at work here. First of all, as noted previously, the signs and their incumbent meanings that Flem uses to form his myths can already be said to have undergone this process, and probably innumerable times. The means by which the mansions, plantations and memorials have gained their "aristocratic" status have themselves been processes of contrivance, of signs already constructed of signifiers and signifieds and then made subject to the conceptual motivations of a Sartoris, a de Spain or a Sutpen. This can be traced all the way back to the founding of such "dynasties" and the earliest establishment of "heredity" in the South and the accumulated tokens of such ideologies imported from Europe, as well as to the fiction written in and about the period which served to "write the South" in a certain way.[15] Faulkner, of course, hardly shies away from showing such processes in action. Therefore, the two-step process I have adapted from Barthes should not be considered as a system complete within itself, but rather as two stages in an essentially infinite system of mythification. As long as this is borne in mind, Barthes's terminology is applicable and useful. Barthes's wider concern is to show that

> . . . since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. . . . Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things.[16]

Faulkner's novels are full of such "talking," be it verbal or otherwise. As such, Flem's deforming of Yoknapatawpha's monuments is shown as being a product of elements already very much present, even before we move on to the particulars of his own career. Even as a process of myth-making, Snopesism is fundamentally *of* Yoknapatawpha. This does not dilute its impact, but rather makes it all the more extreme, as well as suggesting a future after Flem's contribution.

We might ask, however, what is so special about Flem Snopes, if he is basically doing what Yoknapatawpha folk have done for generations, "writing" himself a life. What is it that captivates so many apparently right-thinking individuals over the course of the trilogy?[17] Further to this, if we accept Barthes's theory of myth-making, then *every* literary character, place or event is necessarily mythologised, simply through being rendered in language. This I accept, but suggest that in Flem's case it goes a stage further: Flem, in many ways, can be seen as deliberately putting the process into action, and, as such, could be said to be a literary embodiment of the theory. Barthes, with his fervent declarations of "The Death of the Author,"[18] directs his theory primarily towards the acts of the reader, but I would argue that Flem Snopes manages to shoulder his way into the process of writing itself, within the fiction, and implement the theory for himself. There would be no *conscious* application of any such theory on Flem's part, of course, nor, probably, on Faulkner's. Flem does not read—there is no direct profit to be gained from it—and we are led to believe that he does not entertain any trains of thought other than the financially beneficial, which would rather exclude cultural theory. This notwithstanding, in applying his own ethos (such as it is), or signified concept, to the "myths" of the South, the signs of what we might call the "language-object" South (taking into account, of course, the levels of existing mythology acknowledged above), he *actively* engages in just this theory, creating a metalanguage through an act, effectively, of writership.

Again, we might ask: do not others do this, and most notably Thomas Sutpen? Having previously made a case for considering Sutpen as a Yoknapatawpha writer, could we not say that he engages in a similar process of mythologising? Insofar as Sutpen is a literary character, this would be true, and there would be strong grounds for asserting this case also as regards his engagement with myth. But his actions do not *directly* embody the principles of Barthes's theory in the way that Flem's do. He certainly takes images, codes and practices and subtly changes them forever through the application of his "design." However, as discussed previously, his "artist's impression" more closely reflects the processes of Bakhtin's "continual mutual interaction" between work and world in its own internal mechanics, whereas Flem is literal in his taking of *specific* monuments and deforming them.[19] Sutpen arrives with a conception of a Southern dynasty and proceeds to try to establish it alongside those already existing; Flem takes the machinery of Yoknapatawpha itself and tunes it anew. The essential difference is that there is a certain distance between Sutpen's acts of mimesis and the objects of his art, between his work and the world, and it is in this space that the critical responses and motivations, the "dialogic interaction" of forces, operate to

define both. [20] Flem's mythology negates that space by making *the world itself* his work, rather than trying to represent it. Flem does not imitate, he becomes: he rebuilds the world to his blueprint rather than drawing his plan (or design) according to a perceived, existing world. We might say that there is a deeper structural integrity to Flem's position than to Sutpen's, in that he changes the foundations of the society that he comes to dominate, rather than building another monument upon those foundations. Crucially, Flem's usurpation of dominance also absorbs Sutpen's version as well as the earlier models, and, as such, takes among its signifiers the dialogic forces enshrined therein. Flem's mythology, as well as subsuming and overtaking previous Southern models, also triumphs over other attempts to do so. Turning this around, we can also point here to Sutpen's partial writing of Flem, in that the latter's dominance would not have the same meaning without the former's earlier exploits. When taken as separate, abstract stages in the ongoing process, we can again identify the dialogic processes existing between the two, continuing to shape meanings in the minds of onlookers, readers—both *in* the novels themselves and *of* them. However, it is regarding Flem's own rise to prominence that we can mostly clearly see the creative, writerly embodiment of the myth-making that Barthes discusses.

Frenchman's Bend, as Flem first comes to it in *The Hamlet,* is itself already somewhat removed from the Old South mythical ideal that Sutpen began imitating some sixty or so years earlier. It is not a Sartoris, or indeed a Sutpen, upon whose territory Flem encroaches, but rather Will Varner, who, as Richard Gray has pointed out, is "[n]either a patriarch nor a capitalist in the modern sense. . . . He represents, because in this small world at least he controls, a system that is moving slowly and, it seems, inexorably from a semi-feudal economy to a *laissez-faire* one."[21] The village of Frenchman's Bend stands on the ruined site of one of the old plantations, the folly of an anonymous foreign overlord now forgotten while his "dream, his broad acres were parcelled out now into small shiftless mortgaged farms for the directors of Jefferson banks to squabble over before selling finally to Will Varner . . ."[22] Varner has none of the pretensions of his land's former owner, and is mostly portrayed as a bawdy but tyrannical clown, comic yet sinister. He not only holds the rights to the smallholdings carved out of the old plantation, but also presides over the apparently useless ruins of its mansion, the Old Frenchman place, where he sits in a rough throne made from a flour barrel in outrageous caricature of his predecessor. He tells Ratliff that

> I like to sit here. I'm trying to find out what it must have felt like to be the fool that would need all this . . . just to eat and sleep in. . . . For a

> while it looked like I was going to get shut of it, get it cleared up. . . . But after all, I reckon I'll just keep what there is left of it, just to remind me of my one mistake. This is the only thing I ever brought in my life I couldn't sell to nobody.[23]

This account of his own behaviour is indicative of Varner's transitional position between the "the fool" and Flem Snopes. It is also highly ironic: while we can empathise with his stated desire to know how the "Frenchman" could display such hubris, he simultaneously makes plain his own. To begin with, we might speculate as to who is the bigger fool: at least the Frenchman ate and slept in the house, had some practical use for it. More importantly, however, Varner sees himself as having already made his "one mistake" as regards the Old Frenchman place: by the end of Book One of *The Hamlet,* he is replaced in the barrel chair by Flem Snopes, who by the close of the novel has claimed the ruined house as dowry for Varner's daughter Eula, and, crucially, made money out of it—Varner's bigger mistakes are therefore yet to come. As an "agent of transformation" himself, Will Varner does not find himself evicted from his position, as, say, Manfred de Spain later does, but rather eclipsed. He retains his position as unofficial supreme governor of Frenchman's Bend and Beat Four, where he can still, even at the late stage of *The Mansion,* powerfully influence local and (somewhat unconvincingly, it has to be said) state politics, but is unceremoniously left behind by Flem as he moves on to more profitable pastures in the second and third volumes of the trilogy. As such, our glimpses of him are increasingly scarce as the novels progress, and he is eventually transformed from lord and master of the fictive terrain to a raging and rather ridiculous occasional character, appearing only when thwarted yet again by his former protégé.

All of which, of course, becomes an essential part of Flem's mythological transformation of Frenchman's Bend and, more broadly, Yoknapatawpha itself. His masterstroke in the early stages of his career is to approach a society already in a state of flux, represented by Will Varner, and hijack the process of change. Once he has shoehorned his way into the store—replacing Will's son Jody—he immediately alters the economic and power parameters of the community through the simple expedient of asking Varner to pay for his tobacco, an act that quietly astounds *The Hamlet*'s omnipresent onlookers and subtly begins to change both Varner's and Flem's respective positions. Describing the idiosyncratic soiling of the new clerk's shirts, the authorial voice tells us that "It was as though its wearer, entering though he had into a new life and milieu already channelled to compulsions and customs fixed long before his advent, had nevertheless established in it even on that first

day his own particular soiling groove."[24] And one by one, the fundamental institutions of Frenchman's Bend find themselves realigned to this groove: the annual cotton-weighing is suddenly presided over by the newcomer, Jody being ignominiously returned to the store; the barrel-chair changes occupant; Will Varner's tours of his domain are accompanied by Flem; and so it goes on. As with his initial appearance in the country road, Flem does not change the apparatus of social process, but rather, through his very presence, changes what it means and signifies.

What gives Flem the edge over Varner is his attitude towards the institutions he takes over. Varner, while symbolising in many ways the changes that have occurred in postbellum Yoknapatawpha, still views the ruined mansion, for instance, as a monument, albeit a fallen one: he sits and ponders what it has *meant,* while essentially keeping it in dilapidated stasis as his "one mistake"—to which, of course, it also testifies. Flem has no such contemplative feelings for it: upon prizing the house from Varner's hands, he immediately turns it back into a going concern, something it has failed to be for years and which, after his brief tenure, it will fail to be again (unless we count Lee Goodwin's bootlegging business that occupies it some twenty or so years later in *Sanctuary*). For the short time that it takes him to trick Ratliff, Bookwright and Armstid into buying it from him, Flem brings the Old Frenchman place out of the past tense, even in its ruined state, and turns it once again into a source of profit. The triumph lies in his utilising of the house's meaning, or, in semiological terms, its status as a sign. The house and garden is rumoured to harbour buried treasure, a staple myth of plantations sacked during the Civil War, and corresponding with the burial of the Sartoris family silver in *The Unvanquished;* this, of course, is an inherent part of what it is seen as a monument to. Flem takes this monument, and through his pretending to look for money that he has planted himself, uses its legend to his advantage, thereby making its significance temporarily active. With the completion of the sale to Ratliff and company, he leaves the house to become the site of their folly as of so many others' before, having turned it into his most significant early footprint: a step taken quickly and assuredly, slyly propelling him forward towards the greater gains to be made in Jefferson.

The Old Frenchman place, as given to Flem, takes the form of a dowry for Eula Varner, who becomes Flem's biggest conquest in Frenchman's Bend, and who is the primary site of continuity between his life in Frenchman's Bend and in Jefferson, in *The Hamlet* and *The Town.* Cleanth Brooks has pointed out the painful irony of this most prized of Yoknapatawpha women—and Eula's mythical, or mythicised, beauty is treated as public property—eventually being claimed by the one man unable to appreciate her, either physically, because of his impotence, or psychologically, because

he simply does not care. [25] As with almost everything else that he deals with, the meaning of Eula herself is changed by Flem, as denoted most obviously by her becoming "Mrs Snopes." But more than this, the tying down of her seemingly boundless sexuality—at least in the eyes of Yoknapatawpha's male onlookers—to Flem's arrangement with her father again changes a local monument into a footprint, a transformation dramatised through her own change in behaviour between the two novels, from her apparent immobility in *The Hamlet* to her secretive running around with de Spain in *The Town;* paradoxically, her eventual, somewhat frenzied movement is a symptom of entrapment. The woman who is portrayed as being the ultimate goal for virtually every man who ever sees her, is turned into a step along the way; she is no longer an end but a means. Her usefulness to Flem goes far further than bringing the mansion and its profit to him—she goes some way towards providing what he comes to realise, primarily in *The Town,* he will need if he is to dominate Jefferson: respectability. For Flem transforms the sensuous earth-goddess into a beautiful but unavailable woman, or, more prosaically, turns an unmarried, pregnant girl into the wife of the county's most promising businessman. As he ruthlessly constrains her into a single image, so she involuntarily assists his social ascent. Even her long, adulterous affair with Manfred de Spain is rendered such by her official status as "Mrs Snopes," a fact that Flem exploits ruthlessly, and with fatal consequences.

Flem's "acquiring" and treatment of Eula and her daughter Linda is indicative of his relation to that biggest of all Southern totems: the family. What is more, his manipulation of the meaning or resonance of the family, both of Varner lineage and Snopes, is tied inextricably to his concern, in the latter two books of the trilogy, with the relationship between respectability and wealth. It is in relation to this holy trinity of assets that comparison with Thomas Sutpen is most pertinent and most illuminating. As discussed previously, Sutpen's life, design, and fate is ultimately defined by issues of family; like Flem, he uses his family utterly ruthlessly in order to achieve his goal, and, also like Flem, he destroys lives in a process that ultimately destroys him. Respectability and money, likewise, are vitally involved in the two men's actions and attitudes towards the family, but this is also where they crucially differ. Sutpen surprises many in Jefferson with his choice of wife: rather than the daughter of one of his planter neighbours, he marries a woman who brings him no wealth but immeasurable respectability, which, of course, is what he ultimately craves. All his actions towards his various offspring, from producing them to denying them to causing their deaths, are prompted by their relation to his own standing in society: as human lives they are incidental—they matter only as symbols. The same might be said for Sutpen's

wealth, in financial and material form. It is certainly the goal of many of his actions, and certainly of his business, but it too is finally subordinate to the greater target of respectability, a dynasty, longevity.

Flem Snopes contends with the same three essential components, but, as with everything else, their meanings are subtly changed in his hands, and this primarily through the vital difference in his ultimate goal. Flem craves nothing so intangible as respectability: his *raison d'être* is the accumulation of wealth, and he only begins to care about public opinion when he realises that it can be profitable. Accordingly, his behaviour towards his many family members is somewhat different in *The Hamlet* and *The Town.* In the earlier novel, before his social position becomes a concern to him, he quietly ships his various relations into Frenchman's Bend, generally to fill the gap he leaves when he progresses up to the next rung of the ladder, further propelling his rise to financial dominance by swamping the village with Snopeses.[26] This process continues into the early stages of *The Town,* Flem drafting in Snopeses as and when he needs them, but it is drastically and comically reversed when the economic need for respectability is discovered, a condition to which the variously disreputable Snopes ranks do not conform. I. O. is bribed out of town, the strange children of the petty thief Byron are packed back on to a train, and, most importantly, Flem arranges for Montgomery Ward to be sentenced for a crime—bootlegging—other than the one that he has actually committed, partly so that he can use him to lengthen Mink's prison sentence, and partly because it would not do for the vice-president of one of the town's banks to number among his relations a convicted pornographer. One by one, the very relatives that Flem has imported to further his cause are disposed of for the same reason.

It is Ratliff who originally realises what has prompted this apparent change in attitude, and who realises the power that Flem now has:

> When it's jest money and power a man wants, there is usually some place where he will stop; there's always one thing at least that ever—every man wont do for jest money. But when it's respectability he finds out he wants and has got to have, there aint nothing he wont do to get it and then keep it. And when it's almost too late when he finds out that's what he's got to have, and that even after he gets it he cant jest lock it up and set—sit down on top of it and quit, but instead he has got to keep on working with ever—every breath to keep it, there aint nothing he will stop at, aint nobody or nothing within his scope and reach that may not anguish and grieve and suffer.[27]

Much has been said about Flem's loss of power as a character when he decides that public image as well as financial acumen is commensurate with success, and added to Eula's final confiding of his impotence to Gavin a little later, one cannot fail to note a shift in his effect, a change that marks his career's final stage as its presentation moves from the closing chapters of *The Town* into the markedly elegiac *The Mansion.* This "weakening" of Flem is generally perceived to be intrinsic to the elements of humanity that might be seen to enter his character at these times: such strength as he previously had as a fictional character resided in his status as a machine-like embodiment of New South capitalism. Such revelations by Ratliff and Eula, however, introduce qualities that require understanding on a more emotional or psychological level: Flem is no longer a purely economical abstract, but a recognisably human entity who, however repugnant he may remain, thereby demands sympathy. Myra Jehlen states that "the arch-subversive becomes a Tory. Exchanging his cap for a black felt hat, he disappears into the Establishment, slipping into the future as silently and without trace as he had appeared out of the past already an allegorical cipher."[28] Cleanth Brooks, meanwhile bemoans that

> Faulkner pays a certain price . . . for making Flem respectable. As long as Flem represented pure acquisitiveness—as long as he loved money and power as sheer abstractions—he could count in the novel almost as an elemental force. Doubtless, the respectability that Flem comes to relish is sheer abstraction too, but this later failing of Flem's brings him closer to the breed of human beings that we know and are. In spite of Ratliff's remark on respectability as an irresistible passion, Flem will seem to us less portentous. He becomes more despicable but more vulnerable as he begins to pay attention to what people may think of him.[29]

These accounts, notwithstanding their different agendas and different emphases, essentially identify the same problem: the humanisation of Flem.

However, they fail adequately to explain why this *is* a problem. Surely, in making Flem more recognisably "human," more like us, Faulkner makes him even more of a threat. True, he reveals himself to have certain frailties, or at least to be potentially vulnerable to them, but are we to believe that he was not subject to these beforehand, just because they were not apparent to us? The "elemental force" that Brooks posits the earlier Flem to be is as much a simplification as Jehlen's criticism of him as a failed attempt at historical allegory: he only has such apparently "inhuman" presence because he is so exclusive in his pursuit of the ultimate goal of wealth, and that goal has not

changed. Faulkner has been careful to allow glimpses of "vulnerability" before, during Flem's rise in *The Hamlet* and the early stages of *The Town:* Ratliff proves himself to be at least a worthy foe, if not his equal, in the complicated transactions over the goats, and he gets his financial fingers burned in the brass-stealing fiasco at the water-tower. The important point to make is that Flem always quietly learns from these episodes, as he does during his early days at the bank, and his adoption of "respectability"—a vague quantity which, as with so many other Yoknapatawpha standards, Flem melds to an alternative vision—is another, albeit extreme, step in this learning process. If the removal of some of his inscrutability (and we must not overstate the extent of this: our knowledge of Flem's inner motives remains limited, and we are never allowed even to approach the kind of understanding of him sanctioned towards certain other characters in Faulkner's work) strips him of a certain degree of mystery, then this is surely balanced by our horror at realising the essential humanity at the root of his actions. In finding Flem to be "closer to the breed of human beings that we know and are," as Brooks has it, than we had previously allowed, while simultaneously witnessing his most apparently "inhuman" acts, does not he become *more* terrifying? Our knowledge of him is still based very much upon our lack of understanding—and that of the narrators—but this is a lack now tinged with a worryingly recognisable edge.

This is especially so because, as Brooks and others readily point out, Flem's most "despicable" acts do indeed come after this "humanisation:" the use of Linda's childish social vulnerability to drive Eula to suicide, itself then used to maintain his position in society and cause de Spain to vacate his presidency for him, and the tricking of Mink, through the use of Montgomery Ward, essentially to double his prison sentence. His indirect murder of Eula marks the pinnacle of his rise in social terms; from then on, his career is one of consolidation, of protecting the assets he already has, as portrayed in *The Mansion.* Therefore, it is true to say that he becomes less of a dynamic figure—Mink dramatically takes over this role—but we might easily see that he becomes a more dangerous one, and this primarily because of his vulnerability.

Because his project is no longer so obviously "acquisitive," and thereby less directly a process of progression, we might argue that Flem has ended up dealing in monuments after all. Having applied his techniques of mythification to the tenets of Yoknapatawpha, transforming monuments into footprints, do these same emblems now return to static form? Does the mansion, house and novel both, whilst being the most dramatic example of his writing his way into history and society, ultimately represent a solidification of Snopesism? In some respects, this is the case. Just as the monuments of Yoknapatawpha, through

their intransigence, their attempt at finality, thereby render themselves vulnerable to the myth-making processes that Flem engages in, so his eventual dominance becomes at once ripe for toppling in itself. His role now becomes one of preservation, or more properly conservation—having been the one utterly to subvert it, he now, as Jehlen notes, tries to maintain the status quo, and it is in the juxtaposition of the assiduous attention he employs to do so with the essentially hollow nature of what he tries to protect that the sad but dynamic paradoxes of his life in *The Mansion* can be seen to exist. If his rise, his progress, gave him meaning, so his success makes plain the fallacy of that meaning once it is allowed to settle. Flem sitting in his exaggerated mansion with his feet on the aberrant footrest represents a finished article, a life with a frustrating sense of completion that necessarily constitutes an unsatisfactory conclusion to a life defined by motion. Flem does seem somewhat pathetic as a "Tory," at least in comparison with his formerly subversive self, and this contributes to an implicit judgement being made on what he could be said to represent, which Faulkner himself identified as "simple vanity and rapacity and greed."[30] The meaninglessness of Flem's myth is where the true extent of his eventual "vulnerability" lies, and what gives his story in *The Mansion* such pathos as it has. As the loose ends represented by Mink and Linda, subplots that have got beyond Flem's control, move inexorably toward their final destruction of the greater narrative, Flem himself becomes one of those monuments he had previously so diligently transformed into footsteps. Ultimately, his place in Yoknapatawpha's historical and social landscape is defined by his readers.

Like Sutpen before him, Flem Snopes has dramatically written himself into a world that seems to be set up to enforce anonymity upon him. His methods are very different, though he uses many of the same elements. Similarly, his reception, and also his attitude to his reception, takes a different form, as we shall see in the following section: eventually, however, his story ends in the same outcome of violent death at the hands of someone we might identify as an outraged reader. There is a crucial irony at the heart of the correlative failures of each of these Yoknapatawphan writers: Sutpen's ultimate goal is respectability, and yet it is his lack of concern for his reception at vital stages of his career that eventually leads to his downfall; Flem, meanwhile, adopts respectability, the importance of reception, only as an adjunct to his greater desire for wealth, but then subscribes to its importance to such a degree that he will destroy lives to retain it, shattered lives that will eventually exact their revenge. The lives of both men, while being consciously contrived to a very large degree, are equally dependent on their readership, both in terms of the events that shape them and in their fictional

representation/creation. Flem Snopes engages fully with the tenets of Yoknapatawpha and moulds them to his will to form his own Southern mythology. His failure to realise that his myth cannot survive in isolation from the needs of those it absorbs leads eventually, as for so many before him, to his downfall, while the myth itself becomes yet another fallen monument to Yoknapatawpha's past.

Part Three

Readers in Yoknapatawpha

Part Three

Readers in Yoknapatawpha

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The three characters I have used to illustrate the notion of "writer" figures within the fictional construct of Yoknapatawpha each have a great effect upon the local environment, both physically and psychologically. As well as featuring as the organising centres of the novels in which they appear, their lives and actions have dramatic parts to play in the county's continually unfolding history.[1] In very active ways, these men impress themselves upon Yoknapatawpha with an energy that is matched only by the deliberate, contrived nature of their work. If Sartoris acts as a "classic" Southern planter-hero, then Sutpen and Snopes react to and adapt the modes of local power and behaviour according to their individual temperaments and motives. But if these "written" contributions form major chapters in Yoknapatawpha lore, then their readership within the fiction is similarly important, and the endless processes of interpretation that surround them are just as constitutive of these "texts" as our readership is of the texts in which they appear. In this section, then, I shall examine some of the acts of reading applied to the "writings" I have considered, to demonstrate just how inseparable and mutually creative these elements are, and how dependent Yoknapatawpha is on their interaction. As in the previous section, the larger part of this study will concentrate on the situations regarding Sutpen and Snopes, but I will turn first to the strained readership of the "text" of John Sartoris.

Chapter Six

Witnesses to the Extinction: Reading the Sartoris Text

Neither of the two Yoknapatawpha novels that are most dominated by the ancestral figure of John Sartoris, *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished,* approach the complexity or narrative sophistication of those centring on Thomas Sutpen or Flem Snopes. That this is so can, to a certain extent, be attributed to qualitative difference: these are not the products of Faulkner at the height of his powers. *Sartoris* is an early work, salvaged from the rejected manuscript of the longer *Flags in the Dust,* while *The Unvanquished* is an episodic book essentially constructed from existing short stories (with the exception of the concluding "An Odor of Verbena") that the author himself referred to as "trash."[1] Both inevitably suffer through their publishing proximity to *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* respectively. This argument can only be taken so far, however, and is ultimately of limited value. That these books do not constitute such interrogative meditations upon acts of reading and writing can, I think, be attributed as much to the nature of their central text—Colonel John Sartoris—as to any failing on Faulkner's part; similarly, the reading of the character that we see takes a very different form to that of, say, Thomas Sutpen. Comparatively brash and unsophisticated though these texts might be, then so is Sartoris himself, and the responses and painfully frustrated acts of reading that we see here are as internally important as in any of Faulkner's more revered novels, though in markedly different ways. John Sartoris, as we have seen, presents himself as a Southern archetype, and it is in this manner that I will examine, in turn, those whose lives are spent responding to him. What becomes clear through both *Sartoris*'s tortured intensity and the tall-tale farce of much of *The Unvanquished* is that "Sartoris" stands for a mode of behaviour, a mentality in which is read the very stuff of the Old South, whether harsh reality or glorious myth. "Sartoris. It's

in the blood," proclaims Aunt Jenny Du Pre, and the lives of the two Bayards Sartoris represent attempts to come to terms with having such blood coursing through one's veins.[2]

Castigated for insisting on travelling with his grandson on his break-neck drives around the county, "old" Bayard Sartoris finally explodes at Dr. Peabody:

> What business is it of yours?. . . . By God, can't I break my neck in peace if I want to?. . . . I have already outlived my time. . . . I am the first of my name to see sixty years that I know of. I reckon Old Marster is keeping me for a reliable witness to the extinction of it.[3]

If Bayard's temper here seems somewhat at odds with his quiet, contemplative moments at other points in *Sartoris,* as well as the youthful exuberance of much of *The Unvanquished,* then this conflict of mood is a vital element of his personality, and highly evocative of his attitudes to his heritage. Furthermore, his self-identification as a "witness" to the end of his family line is crucial, and can be broadened out to cover other such figures, notably "young" Bayard III, as we shall see. As old Bayard himself points out here, he is already an anomaly in terms of his comparative longevity, and as such can perhaps already be said to be "witnessing the extinction" of Sartoris; Daniel J. Singal discusses how "[a] self-respecting male Sartoris . . . never dies peacefully in bed at an advanced age but rather in some form of reckless combat while still in his prime."[4] That he can be referred to as "old" Bayard at all is essentially a contradiction in terms, and in his self-contradictory drives with his grandson there is a sense of Bayard's ambiguous engagement with his father's legacy. While ostensibly disapproving, this is his way of ensuring he does not suffer the indignity of a peaceful death. And, of course, his (and everyone else's) predictions are correct: he does die violently in the car, and in so doing sets young Bayard off on his final drive towards self-destruction in the prototype aeroplane. Thus, in a sense, while he fulfils the Sartoris requirement of a dramatic death, he is present at and partially constitutive of its final collapse, for with his grandson's resulting descent towards effective suicide the family traditions are finally broken, at least in name and hope, by Narcissa's refusal to name their child John. Crucially, as Singal also points out, the fatal car crash happens in the "view" of the Colonel's monstrous tomb, thereby ensuring that all three generations "witness the extinction" of what they represent, and at the same time are implicated in it.[5] The ambiguity of the Sartoris myth's fate is enshrined in the ways its inheritors respond to it, the extent to which their lives serve both to sustain and kill it.

Bayard's choice of words in this passage is important in further ways, however, and can be said to encapsulate the peculiar situation of Sartoris production and reception. Whereas the many readers of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* are shown to be highly "writerly" in their constructive relation to him, as we shall see, the roles of the Sartoris readers have a rather more "readerly" aspect, to appropriate the terms that Barthes uses in *S/Z*.[6] This is not, in this case, to deny their crucial importance but rather to note the paradoxically more definite effect they have. This is fundamentally based in the nature of the Sartoris text itself, as discussed in Chapter Three: its very definiteness, its arrogance and assumed primacy over those who will interpret it render it very close to what Barthes calls the "classic text."[7] This use of the term "classic" is not positive, as we have seen, but rather points to the intransigence of meaning that the readerly text will produce: the reader is not free to interact creatively with the text, an activity which Barthes calls "the goal of literary work (of literature as work)," but only to "consume" it, to accept its precepts and results, literally, as read.[8] The Sartoris "text," as such, fits very easily into this "classic" mould through its thorough identification with a represented mindset—that of the old, glorious South. One's only possible means of response to such a text, the implication is, is either to accept or to reject it as given: to respond, or witness, rather than contribute. The battles that we see the two Bayards engaging in through *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished* are, in this sense, between their conflicting desires to accept or reject their ancestor's legacy: in Richard Gray's words, they act as

> . . . keeper[s] of the flame, commemorator[s] of the family legend. Like old Bayard musing over the Sartoris relics in the attic, they are all drawn into the role of antiquary or memorialist: their sole purpose being, it seems, not to act but to record—not to add new stories but to remember and rehearse old ones.[9]

The characters of the two most important Sartoris readers are largely determined by the extent to which they live up to the legend, and they are each painfully aware of this. They cannot light or fuel the flame, but only keep it. Indeed, it is their very inability to take a productive role in what it is to be a Sartoris that leads primarily to their ultimate failure, and the "extinction" of the myth itself. The Sartoris text's very lack of malleability, its *readerliness,* leads to the destruction of its readers in Yoknapatawpha: with no apparent means to write themselves into the story, they themselves are destined eventually for textual negation.

All this throws into ambiguity old Bayard's claim that he will be a "*reliable* witness to the extinction" (my emphasis). Reliability, in this instance,

would seem to mean reading as the writer, the Colonel, intended; that is, accepting the myth as it is set down—this is rendered especially so by the occasional confusion in the use of the phrase "Old Marster" as mixed reference to either God and/or the Colonel (and in his role as a Yoknapatawpha writer, especially such a commanding one, Sartoris's godlike assumptions are all the stronger), with the implied requirement for appropriate adherence on the part of the follower.[10] "Extinction," on the other hand, implies a rejection of the myth, allowing it to die. Therefore, quite apart from the pointed *lack* of reliability that is not only inherent but dramatised in acts of readership in Yoknapatawpha, this phrase of Bayard's refers acutely to the dilemmas of his and others' readerly roles. Being handed down a text, as echoed by the Sartoris family bible and its genealogy, they are forced either to provide reliable witness to it, or to assist in its extinction: Bayard's assertion that he will do both is highly prescient.

This authorial authority on the original John Sartoris's part, or the dominance of his text itself, might cause us to ask how profitable the study of its readership (within Faulkner's novels) can be. If, to follow Barthes, the most valuable texts are those that allow, indeed encourage, a multiplicity of readings that themselves become textual creations, why focus upon one that appears to do the opposite, to restrict and control its readership? Such an exercise is useful because it is exactly this problem that Faulkner addresses in *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished:* what happens when a mentality or myth as monolithic as Sartoris is forced upon a readership? As discussed previously, for all his dominance, Colonel Sartoris himself is largely absent from the direct narratives of the novels; the concentration is upon those he affects, most notably his descendants. The novels consider the impact of such a figure on those who are compelled to regard him. This kind of examination is central to much of Faulkner's work, of course—most notably *Absalom, Absalom!*—but here it takes the form of assessing the damage done by textual absolutism: eventual negation of both text and reader. This being so, we might very profitably examine acts of readership, or attempted readership, in relation to Colonel John Sartoris.

Suggestions of these tensions are apparent early on in the chronological history of the relationship between old Bayard and his father:[11]

> He came toward the step and began to mount, the sabre heavy and flat at his side. Then I began to smell it again, like each time he returned . . . that odor in his clothes and beard and flesh too which I believed was the smell of powder and glory, the elected victorious but know better now: know now to have been only the will to endure, a sardonic

> and even humorous declining of self-delusion which is not even kin to that optimism which believes that that which is about to happen to us can possibly be the worst which we can suffer.[12]

This account of Colonel Sartoris's return from battle is given by his son Bayard near the beginning of "Ambuscade," the first section of *The Unvanquished,* and neatly establishes both the tensions apparent within him with regard to his father and what he represents, and the relations between the figure of the child protagonist and his more mature textual presence as the narrator. In calling attention to the differences between what he believed in the past and "knows" now, Bayard immediately sets up a narrative distance within which conflicting views can be fielded. Thus, the myth of "the elected victorious" does battle with "the will to endure" in an engagement which never finds adequate resolution in Bayard's mind or in the texts of either this novel or *Sartoris.* The juxtaposition of the two readings within the single description of his father's return, as well as actively rehearsing the relationship between myth and reality—or, rather, interpretations of each of these—are vitally constitutive of the Colonel and his son as we perceive them, and, to a degree, of their perceptions of themselves and each other. For within the tableau of the reunion that we are presented with there are at least four figures involved: Bayard the young protagonist, Bayard the older narrator, and the two John Sartorises that are the projections of each of these. On the face of things, of course, the scene features only two characters *per se,* but the dramatised variety of readings inherent in the situation and its narration shows the multidimensional nature of the effects of readership—and its relaying in the form of storytelling—and can suffice as a comparatively simple model for the creative reading processes we will examine over the course of this section of my study. Somewhere between the various aspects of the Sartoris text that we see here lurks John Sartoris himself, but any attempt to pin him down exactly would be hopeless: links can be made here with the interactive role of Faulkner and the reader in *The Sound and the Fury* discussed in Chapter One, and with the relationship of Quentin Compson and Shreve to the Sutpens.

As well as the Colonel himself, the character of Bayard is being fundamentally constructed here primarily through his relationship with the Sartoris myth, and, more broadly, the myth of the Old South itself. In this context, Bayard serves as an embodiment of one of the Yoknapatawpha novels' chief concerns: the relationships between the South's past, its conceptions of that past, and its present. As a young man on the cusp of change in his family and regional history, Bayard's mentality and life enact many aspects of

Yoknapatawpha's struggles with itself. In the passage discussed above, we can see the early stages of the production of Bayard through his responses to a situation, and the clashing and merging of these responses—this we see again and again in Faulkner's work. The particular character of Bayard himself, as well as that of his grandson, is crucial to the whole Yoknapatawpha saga in its response to the Sartoris "text." As I have noted, the essentially "classic" nature of the Sartoris text effectively enforces the nature of its readership, and the frustration that results from this is paramount in the mentalities and decisions of the readers in these two novels.

To measure Bayard's developing but frustrated career as a reader here—as well as that of his grandson and namesake—we might refer to a branch of reader-response theory that, perhaps paradoxically, has its roots in New Critical thinking, in that it takes as its primary focus the central importance of the text, rather than the reader's interpretative power, in the creation of meaning and event. In his essay "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," Walker Gibson uses an essentially formalist framework to study the reader's role in bringing out the meaning of a work: as Jane P. Tompkins points out, Gibson "makes no theoretical moves not already provided for by New Critical doctrine," but he does at least provide useful foundations for more sophisticated studies to come.[13] In many ways, such an approach to text is inappropriate for the study of Yoknapatawpha, as its implied sense of closure seems to run counter to the "openness" of its most "writerly" texts—the point is, very often, that we can *not* assume that there is a final, intransigent meaning to be inferred or assumed, and this principle is explored on the levels of the relationship between Faulkner himself and the reader, and within the novels themselves. In the particular case of the Sartoris text, however, we can apply Gibson's ideas in an effectively inverted, or perhaps negative manner, to examine what happens when the reader refuses to submit to the text's demands, a case that Gibson, and, subconsciously, John Sartoris, would consider to be textual failure.

The key emphasis of Gibson's essay is make a distinction between the "real" figures of the author and reader on the one hand, and the "speaker" and "mock reader" on the other, the latter pairing being the personas assumed by the former when engaging in their respective duties toward the text. Just as the author adopts a "voice or disguise. . . . made of language alone"[14] quite apart from the historical actuality of the writer himself, so the reader does the same:

> The fact is that every time we open the pages of another piece of writing, we are embarked on a new adventure in which we become a new

> person—a person as controlled and definable and as remote from the chaotic self of daily life as the lover in the sonnet. Subject to the degree of our literary sensibility, we are recreated by the language. We assume, for the sake of experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume, and, if we cannot assume them, we throw the book away.[15]

This assumed persona is the "mock reader." Gibson's focus is, of course, upon the relationship surrounding the book itself—*The Unvanquished,* for instance—wherein the speaker and mock reader exist on a kind of apocryphal plane separate from the "real" world that does not figure in the equation. Taking this literally, or perhaps playfully, we might almost suggest "Yoknapatawpha" as a name for the Faulknerian version of this arena, were it not for the inflexibility of Gibson's model as he develops it. However, my purpose here is to take its implications and apply them to similar relationships within the work itself, wherein this same inflexibility proves disabling. For in Gibson's essentially New Critical interpretation, each text has only one mock reader, to be gleaned from the words on the page alone, whose viability is dependent upon the quality of both the writing itself and the reader's "literary sensibility:" if either of these is unsatisfactory, the mock reader fails to emerge and "we throw the book away." Following this logic, Gibson asserts that a "bad book . . . is a book in whose mock reader we discover a person we refuse to become, a mask we refuse to put on, a role we will not play."[16] Conversely, this failure may also be down to lack of sensibility in the reader; either way, the assumption is that the mock reader comes with the book, to be either discovered or not.

As an overall theory, this has clear limitations, especially with regard to an author so concerned with the malleability of interpretation as Faulkner. In saying that meaning or character is so firmly and singularly entrenched in the text itself to the exclusion of creative interpretation, Gibson stifles the potential of his own foundations, the implications of which are far more productively extended and explored by later theorists such as Stanley E. Fish and Wolfgang Iser, in their different ways.[17] It is worth noting, also, that his notion of the ideal relationship between text and reader is somewhat akin to that of the "classic" text rejected by Barthes. Nevertheless, the principle of the "mock reader" is an interesting one, if only because its death through the breakdown in communication that occurs in Gibson's negative scenario is mirrored by the crises in writer-reader relations surrounding the Sartoris myth. The tragedy of Sartoris is that, whether through textual inadequacy or the unwillingness of its readers, or both, its mock reader fails to be realised by those entrusted with its care.

This situation becomes painfully apparent at the moment of the Colonel's death, in the concluding and most celebrated section of *The Unvanquished,* "An Odor of Verbena." As Bayard reflects upon hearing the news from his university mentor, "I was now The Sartoris. (The Sartoris: that had been one of the concomitant flashes, along with the *at last it has happened* when Professor Wilkins opened my door.)"[18] The Colonel's resonance gains most of its strength upon his death, when his corporeal self is no longer there to confuse issues and he can exist purely as myth; Bayard's awareness of the weight of this inheritance is intense, as is marked by his instant realisation of his expectation of such an outcome. As a boy during the Civil War, Bayard had lived up to the Sartoris code and exacted revenge upon Grumby for killing his grandmother; now he is faced with the apparent need to do the same for the progenitor of the myth itself, his father. But, as has been suggested by the narrative tone from that opening consideration in "Ambuscade" on, the mature(r) Bayard no longer adopts the family mentality so naturally, and "An Odor of Verbena" shows his eventual break from the very inevitable process he identifies himself.

This story is the chief crisis point in the progression of Bayard's readership, and it is where the arrogance of the Sartoris myth's presumed authority is finally confronted. As "the Sartoris," Bayard is now expected by everybody, whether approving or otherwise, to seek his father's killer's blood. His decision to face Redmond unarmed and drive him out of town through shame is, therefore, a significant one, and represents a shift in power-relations between the myth and its readers that it will never fully recover from. To borrow from Walker Gibson, Bayard opens the text again and is faced with becoming the mock reader—the Sartoris—that it demands. In order to fulfil his obligations in terms of the myth itself, Bayard must act according to a certain mode of behaviour. This he elects not to do, thereby refusing to adopt the persona expected of him and effectively "throwing the book away"; either text or reader—or, more probably, both—has failed here.

This is not to say that the myth dies, as such: near the close of *The Unvanquished,* Bayard himself reflects upon its continuing influence as he passes his father's body lying in state:

> I had not looked at him again. I had started to before I left the house but I did not, I did not see him again and all the pictures we had of him were bad ones because a picture could no more have held him than the house could have kept his body. But I didn't need to see him again because he was there, he would always be there; maybe what Drusilla meant by his dream was not something which he possessed but something which he had bequeathed us which we could never forget, which

> would even assume the corporeal shape of him whenever any of us, black or white, closed our eyes.[19]

This haunting image of Sartoris is the abiding image of *Sartoris,* a looming shade over the lives of all his descendants, in many ways more affecting than the living man himself ever was. And that this is a bequest is vital to its nature—the Sartoris readers are being given something that, with the death of the man himself, is intended to be considered complete. It is an image that they can or must see, but not, as with Sutpen, that they can contribute to. Old Bayard, of course, continues to muse obsessively over "the stark dissolving apotheosis of his name," perhaps most poignantly when poring over the family bible, sword, and other relics; tellingly, however, all he can add to the text are the latest deaths, underneath all the others.[20] But despite this lifelong obsession with what it is to be a Sartoris, which includes a keen awareness of his social rank and position carried into his role as bank president, the ambiguous tensions inherent in his self-identification as a "reliable witness to the extinction" of his name are always present.

More violently haunted by the Colonel's "bequest" is his great-grandson "young" Bayard III, whose turbulent decline is the major dynamic of *Sartoris.* While his attitude is similarly ambivalent towards his heritage, his mixed feelings manifest themselves in much more destructive ways; Bayard is torn between what Singal identifies as the narcissistic "eaglelike identity of a Sartoris" and the cyclical, disabling compulsion that this holds him in, displaying simultaneously "a mixture of loyalty and hostility toward his Sartoris heritage."[21] Indeed, if his grandfather's rebellion against the Sartoris text took a pointedly peaceful tone, young Bayard's battle with its mock-readership paradoxically embodies much of its violence. His engagement with Sartoris is complicated by the fact that he is someone to whom the concept of readership is in itself a relatively alien one: Narcissa's reading to him during a period of convalescence is peculiar because "[h]e cared nothing at all about books; it is doubtful if he had ever read a book on his own initiative."[22] What is more, on at least one occasion actively he is disturbed by the writings of others, when he is awoken by a tumbling stack of books.[23] Beyond this convenient metaphor, Bayard's response to the myth does seem to be one of the anti-reader, or at least somebody who wants to adopt such a pose. As Singal has pointed out, Bayard dearly wants to be the man of action that his own brother John was, the apparent repository of all that was "glorious" about being of the Old South.[24] But against this he is forced by his "compulsion" to attend to the family legend, apparently haunted by the ghost, or dream, of his great-grandfather as much if not more than old Bayard. His

suicidal recklessness reflects much of the passion of Sartoris, but little of the reason, such as it is.

Like his grandfather, young Bayard is faced with living according to a code, a set of rules imposed by his very name, in his case emphasised by its apparent presence in the figure of his twin brother. Once more, he cannot or will not take it upon himself to become the mock reader that the family text requires, but the authority that the myth assumes prevents him from being able to make any productive contribution to the contrary: this is the underlying tenor of his suffering. Failing to be "the Sartoris," but compelled not to be anything else, he is forced into a kind of textual negation. Whereas his older namesake faces this dilemma by becoming a rather tame version of the social Sartoris, young Bayard's failure takes the form of self-destruction, one that does indeed lead to the effective "extinction" of his line. Both these most crucial of the Sartoris readers act as "witnesses" to this processes; as their painful failure to become the mock readers that their family text requires makes clear, however, they are far from "reliable," and it is the clash of the writer-reader relationship's instability and its presumed integrity that leads to the ultimate collapse of the Sartoris myth. Horace Benbow's throwaway comment that the Sartorises are a "Funny family. Always going to wars, and always getting killed"[25] is more pertinent than it may at first appear: the greatest and most traumatic war that repeated generations of Sartorises engage in is with what effectively amounts to their destiny, whether they accept or attempt to repudiate it.

Chapter Seven

Perhaps (I Like to Think This): Reading *Absalom, Absalom!* and the Sutpen Text

If the "text" of John Sartoris has its effect through its intransigence, a resistance to interpretive malleability that ultimately leads to the tortured decline of its closest readers and inheritors, then that of his contemporary Thomas Sutpen presents a problem that seems almost directly opposite. Sutpen, as we and the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* come to appreciate him, is the product of an interminable mass of interpretation, and his huge impact on Yoknapatawpha County is rooted in his profound *unreadability,* the lack of clear opportunity to pin him down and neatly categorise his place in history. This lack of clarity, of course, is what leads so many to attempt to understand his story, which in this case means its perpetual and circuitous reading and rereading. *Absalom, Absalom!* itself is the very stuff of this obsessive study, and here more than anywhere else in Faulkner's fiction is dramatised the essentially creative aspect of the reading process. If, as I have suggested, this is a novel about the work of a "writer," Thomas Sutpen, then it is also the painstaking enactment of his readership; if it is Faulkner's most "difficult" book, then this is largely because the one thing it does make clear is the magnitude of what we take on when we read. For Quentin Compson and the other readers within the novel itself, the object of their gaze is a life, its work and its effects; that this is much the same for those of us physically outside the book, engaging in literary criticism, becomes painfully clear as we read. For such is the blurring of boundaries between form and content in this novel that the narrators' difficulties become the reader's: our experience does not merely mirror theirs, but, in interpretive terms at least, is the very same process. And as *Absalom, Absalom!,* and Yoknapatawpha in general, only

comes to fruition with this writerly interaction, so do the Sutpen family only live in the dialectic between the varying accounts that merge and contrast within the book.

The "continual mutual interaction" between "work and world" that I have appropriated from Bakhtin's theories of dialogic relations to understand Sutpen's writerly approach to his Southern environment applies equally to its reception.[1] In this chapter, I shall examine the ways in which Sutpen and his story are, in turn, constructed by members of that society of which he himself has been so constitutive. If Sutpen's life represents the "work" of this equation, then my focus here shall be upon its readership, the "world" that is both its object and its co-creator. But whereas I have concentrated upon the specifics of Sutpen's individual quest, my approach in this chapter will not be guided in the main by studies of the individual reader-narrators themselves. Though the various characters of the narrators will inevitably come into play to an extent, this novel *never* presents only one, undiluted voice, and so I shall concentrate rather upon the communal act in which they engage and its complex, cumulative effect on certain aspects of Yoknapatawpha history.[2]

Much has been made of *Absalom, Absalom!*'s many thematic parallels with *The Sound and the Fury,* both as two component parts of the wider Yoknapatawpha series and as clearly interrelated stories, most obviously exemplified by Quentin Compson's presence in both novels. But beyond the common consideration of classically Faulknerian and Southern themes, there is an underlying correspondence between their deeper analyses of how these concerns are formulated and sustained, which in the inextricable meshing of form and content translates as a system of reader-writer relations. The formal relationship between the two books is as complex as everything else about them, and the later work can be seen as both a distillation of *The Sound and the Fury*'s use and investigation of readership and writership, and as a view of it from a wider perspective. What it does most dramatically is to take the creative relationship between the writer and reader that I have discussed in relation to *The Sound and the Fury,* and bring it into the foreground, to interrogate the actions of Quentin *et al* in relation to Sutpen in the same way as we have been forced to consider our own in relation to the characters of the earlier book. *The Sound and the Fury* is not my focus here, but it is worth bearing in mind that the relationships that in many ways constitute the text of *Absalom, Absalom!* are similar to those we have been forced to recognise between ourselves and that novel. In examining the interaction between the narrators and the life of Thomas Sutpen, we shall also, in effect, be assessing anew our own interaction with the literature.

The psychoanalytic theorist Norman N. Holland identifies clear-sighted and very useful parallels between our observation of human lives and our activities when reading, that illustrate nicely both the relationship between these two novels and the case I am making for the reading and writing processes to be found within and of *Absalom, Absalom!* and Yoknapatawpha more generally. In his 1975 essay "Unity Identity Text Self," Holland examines the key terms of his title to suggest that "*Identity* is the *unity* I find in a *self* if I look at it as though it were a *text.*"[3] While rather quickly accounting for *text* as the formalist and New Critical "words on the page,"[4] and *self* as one's "own person,"[5] Holland provides detailed analysis of our identification of *unity* and *identity,* in texts and selves respectively. After listing calls for literary unity from Plato through to the late twentieth century, he suggests that we arrive at this goal through grouping the particular details of a work under certain themes, and then grouping these into a "central theme," which in itself need not be unique either to the person or the work, and which process "is as intuitive and imaginative as it is rational."[6] Similarly, Holland uses the work of the psychologist Heinz Lichtenstein to suggest that "we can be precise about individuality by conceiving of the individual as living out variations on an identity theme much as a musician might play out an infinity of variations on a single melody."[7] Holland brings the study of these two key terms together to show that, when studying a human life,

> I can abstract, from the choices in the life I see, facts as visible as the words on the page, various subordinate patterns and themes until I arrive at one central, unifying pattern in that life which is the invariant sameness, the "identity theme" of the individual living it. In other words, just as I can arrive at a *unity* for the series of choices that is *Hamlet* by means of a central, unifying theme, so I can arrive at an *identity* for a particular self by means of a centering identity theme.[8]

Again, readings arrived at need not necessarily be unique to either text/self or reader; as we shall see, plurality of interpretation is crucial and inevitable.

With *Absalom, Absalom!,* this principle is rendered in dramatic and self-reflexive form, and in such a way that we can identify *both* these analogous processes going on at the same time. The various narrators obsessively attempt to piece together Thomas Sutpen' s life and the motivations behind it, through a painstaking process of sifting through fragmented evidence and trying to fill in the gaps through interpretation and reason. The reader of Faulkner's book, following Holland's thesis, engages in much the same activity in trying to understand the unity of the text. In this case, however, not

only are the two highly comparable, they are fundamentally the same: the narrators interpret a life, while we read a novel of which that life and its interpretation is the centre. Effectively, we study a person while simultaneously studying others doing just that. Faulkner goes further than Holland. He not only suggests that these acts are parallel, and not only shows them to be so: the formal point in the construction of this novel is that they are the same, a point made by collapsing the distinction between them. Our awareness of this, and its importance, is made all the more intense by each narrator's acute awareness of the others' machinations, and by the explicit likening of their activities to the act of reading, not least in Mr. Compson's frustration at the elusiveness of his subject:

> It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they dont explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature . . . ; we see dimly people . . . They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you reread, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs.[9]

As well as articulating the sheer difficulty of constructing the saga of Sutpen's Hundred, Mr. Compson here captures much of the experience of *Absalom, Absalom!*'s reader. As such, the above passage is a telling, not to mention brave, self-reflexive comment to place in a novel so apparently concerned with making things difficult for those reading it. It also points out that this is no mere literary contrivance for its own sake, but synonymous with the fundamental need to understand ourselves and our contexts. If the work of literature requires effort on the part of its reader, effort that will frequently be frustrated, then so does its object: life.

Inherent in this situation is consideration of what we might feel inclined to call "truth." What both *The Sound and the Fury* and, to an even greater extent, *Absalom, Absalom!* most crucially examine is the *creation* of

truth, and as such they question the viability of the concept. We might bear in mind Quentin's famous reflection while giving his account of the story to Shreve:

> *Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm* thinking *Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.*[10]

The final possibility considered by Quentin here momentarily brings to mind the notion of the "mock reader" suggested by Walker Gibson,[11] the possibility that he and his co-narrators, to differing extents, are adopting the persona required by Sutpen's "text." However, while the implications of Gibson's somewhat limited theory go some way towards explaining the frustrated readings involved in *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished,* consideration of this reflection in the wider context of the rest of this passage and of *Absalom, Absalom!* as a whole quickly makes clear how redundant the idea of a single mock reader must be in the far more complex field of narrative involved here. If Sutpen is the pebble, and the ripples and "*narrow umbilical water-cord*[*s*]" are the processes of interpretation, then all are shown to be as constitutive of history as each other, while "*happen*" keeps on moving "*at the original ripple-space.*" Thus, in this one image is posited the continual occurrence of the original, chronotopic event, and the mutually formative actions of those whose collective and varying interpretation enable this to be so, voluntarily or otherwise.

Crucial to this passage is the awareness of how each pool "*reflect[s] in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky*:" how each voice speaks differently in relation to Sutpen. This is the prime dynamic of *Absalom, Absalom!,* and its investigation is our greatest means of trying to understand both Sutpen himself and the novel as a whole. Like *The Sound and the Fury* before it, this is a study of the multiplicity of possible readings of some uncertain people and events, and what is effectively a short story becomes a kaleidoscope of disparate narrative in which it is nigh on impossible to establish a clearly

defined image. We can refer again to Norman Holland, among others, to consider the reasons for such differences, as he continues his case for the similarity of the studies of text and self by next probing the nature of the study itself. Holland further establishes the link between textual unity and personal identity by switching the focus back to the identity of the figure doing the interpreting. As mentioned earlier, the "central theme" identified in a text, or the "identity theme" in a person, should not be considered exclusive: they can be applied to other texts/people, and the theme arrived at can vary greatly from reader to reader. Any single text is liable to inspire numerous different readings because "[t]he unity we find in literary texts is impregnated with the identity that finds that unity." Every person to read a text or person does so according to their own individual "identity theme," and "[e]ach will have different ways of making the text into an experience with a coherence and significance that satisfies."[12] Furthermore, this premise is not without individual purpose:

> The overarching principle is: identity re-creates itself, or, to put it another way, style—in the sense of personal style—creates itself. That is, all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves. We work through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation. We interact with the work, making it part of our own psychic economy and making ourselves part of the literary work—as we interpret it.[13]

This bears relation to aspects of the argument set out by Stanley E. Fish, in the post-structuralist stance he adopts in "Interpreting the *Variorum*" (1976), that reading is essentially "a succession of decisions made by readers about an author's intention; decisions that are not limited to the specifying of purpose but include the specifying of every aspect of successively intended worlds."[14] To counter potential accusations of his merely describing the reader finding things formalistically "in" the text, Fish proposes the contrary view that "rather than intention and its formal realization producing interpretation (the 'normal' picture), interpretation creates intention and its formal realization by creating the conditions in which it becomes possible to pick them out."[15] Therefore, going even further than Holland's assertion that the textual unity/personal identity arrived at is the largely the product of the reader's own identity, Fish suggests that such textual shape can *only* arise from the interpretive activities applied: "intention is known when and only when it is recognized."[16] And, meeting with Holland, the mode of this recognition will inevitably vary from reader to reader.

These principles are fundamental to the various interpretations of the Sutpen story to be found in *Absalom, Absalom!* This is not to deny certain similarities: part of the reason the narrators are so obsessively concerned with Sutpen's story is their sense of a common heritage with it, and of which it has become a part in turn, as will their various interpretations. What Quentin feels while hearing Miss Rosa's story is in the background of all the narrators' accounts:

> It was a day of listening too—the listening, the hearing in 1909 mostly about that which he already knew, since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells had rung on that Sunday morning in 1833 and, on Sundays, heard even one of the original three bells in the same steeple where descendants of the same pigeons strutted and crooned or wheeled in short courses resembling soft fluid paint-smears on the soft summer sky.[17]

The sense of communal heritage is rendered tangible here as air and sound, with the arrogance and local genealogy of the pigeons creating a satiric parallel with their human counterparts in Jefferson. Whatever the differences in the accounts to come, Faulkner here asserts the essential regional component in all of them; indeed, this is what colours the readings, and in many ways the novel itself, with their peculiar intensity. Indeed, it is not to contradict the assertion of individual interpretive control over material to insist upon this common regionalism, for the narrators' differing attitudes towards this history go a long way towards shaping their dispositions and accounts. In the world of this novel, however, "history," as such, does not take on the monolithic, "classic" aspect claimed by John Sartoris, and this sense of a common resource upon which to draw is shown to be disturbingly illusory. If the narrators' attitudes are marked by their relation to the South, then "the South" as a concept is itself revealed as being as malleable as the individual histories explored within it, subject in turn to the interpretation of those it would appear, itself, to shape.

All the major narrators in *Absalom, Absalom!* make explicit reference to their conscious creation of the scenes and people they describe, quite aside from the implicit ways in which the reader can see their own dispositions to have coloured the narrative. We can detect a certain cynical enjoyment in Mr. Compson's self-appointed position as scribe of the Sutpen saga: there is a feeling of a private game being played in the suggestion of homoerotic overtones he attributes to Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon's first meeting. With no means of knowing the nature of this encounter, Mr. Compson frames it

in wilful conjecture—"perhaps (I like to think this)"—thereby adding elements that he has constructed himself through his admitted desire to have them there.[18] Similarly, when discussing Sutpen's own aggressive writing of his story, he considers the naming of Clytie, or Clytemnestra:

> He named Clytie as he named them all, the one before Clytie and Henry and Judith even, with that same robust and sardonic temerity, naming with his own mouth his own ironic fecundity of dragon's teeth. Only I have always liked to believe that he intended to name Clytie, Cassandra, prompted by some pure dramatic economy not only to beget but to designate the presiding augur of his own disaster, and that he just got the name wrong through a mistake natural in a man who must have almost taught himself to read . . . [19]

Here, again, Mr. Compson explicitly admits to the creation of intention as discussed by Fish. He is, of course, guilty of the same narrative trait he recognises in Sutpen: he attempts to shape the narrative to his own design. The name "Clytemnestra" does not fit with his conception of the Sutpen tale, so he concocts an alternative reality in order to reconcile his own requirements from the story to the "facts" of the case. This "reality" may or may not be accurate, but in the context this is irrelevant. To quote Holland, Mr. Compson, in his own way, is "making the text into an experience with a coherence and significance that satisfies."[20] What makes this blatant fictionalising all the more ironic in terms of the alleged attempt to find the "truth" is the leitmotif of "doubtless" to be found in his narrative, a word whose meaning is perpetually undermined by being juxtaposed with scenarios that are quite clearly open to doubt. Indeed, it is only because there *is* so much doubt that Mr. Compson feels the need to fictionalise consciously and to substantiate his findings by dismissing the doubt that originally allowed for them.

Miss Rosa, the only one of the present-day narrators to have actually known Sutpen first-hand, and indeed to have been part of the story as it occurred in the first place, recognises her own potential invention of people and events. At the same time as her passion seems to insist upon the correctness of her portrayal of Sutpen and his progeny, she points out that "*(I never saw* [Charles Bon]. *I never even saw him dead. I heard a name, I saw a photograph, I helped to make a grave: and that was all).*"[21] From these sparse elements, she constructs a character about whom she has a complex of conflicting feelings, a character which she effectively acknowledges to be very much the product of her own "identity theme:"

> *. . . even before I saw the photograph I could have recognized, nay, described, the very face. But I never saw it. I do not even know of my own knowledge that Ellen ever saw it, that Judith ever loved it, that Henry slew it: so who will dispute me when I say, Why did I not invent, create it?—And I know this: if I were God I would invent out of this seething turmoil we call progress something (a machine perhaps) which would adorn the barren mirror altars of every plain girl who breathes with such as this—which is so little since we want so little—this pictured face. It would not even need a skull behind it; almost anonymous, it would only need vague inference of some walking flesh and blood desired by someone else even if only in some shadow-realm of make-believe.*[22]

By her own testimony, Miss Rosa could describe the face because it is one that she has created herself, with no concrete grounds upon which to assert that it ever existed outside this creation; on this basis, it would indeed be very hard to "*dispute*" her over this, regardless of Bon's "existence" in the accounts of others. Miss Rosa is fully aware that Bon is, in effect, a literary character for herself as a reader as well as for her audience, a character whose very realisation depends upon her interpretation: the godlike overtones of her writerly actions do not escape her. None of this stops her from believing her account to be the correct one, and, indeed, it does not necessarily discount it from being so; again, however, this is largely irrelevant. Whatever the basis of her picture in empirical "truth," she has, like Mr. Compson, brought a scenario into being through interpretation.

The most extreme and radical example of this conscious fictionalising on the part of the book's narrators is, of course, the extraordinary interaction of Quentin and Shreve, in their student rooms in Harvard in 1910, with the players in the Sutpen drama in the 1860s, "creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere . . ."[23] Like all the other narrators, Quentin and Shreve will take a given "fact" and consider its possible, and often multiple, contexts and resonance, thereby both displaying their own attitudes, and actively, consciously creating elements in the Sutpen history. But what is more important, I think, about this celebrated section of *Absalom, Absalom!* is its relation to subtler and more fundamental narrative operations that have been in action throughout. If Chapter Eight is the novel's dramatic apex, then this is largely due its formal status as the ultimate resolution—or, perhaps more properly, *dis*solution—of the interrogation of narrative readership. If the recognisable parameters of narrative fall away at this point, taking the work onto another level altogether, then this is a culmination of the

novel's directions and methods that exist on a much subtler and yet ultimately more devastating level than the conscious, almost playful desire to write expressed by Mr. Compson and Miss Rosa, and even Quentin and Shreve themselves.

Roland Végsö gives a Derridean interpretation of the narrators' "game," wherein each player "enjoys a certain kind of freedom: he or she has the right to tell the story the way he or she wants it to be told and to fill in the gaps."[24] And indeed what we see on the part of the principal narrators is a desire, stated or otherwise, to appropriate the signs of their heritage and to attempt to exert authorial control over them; this we see in the various pictures of Sutpen that arise from their accounts. But, argues Végsö, the interplay between Quentin and Shreve marks the point in the novel where "the narration of the game is surrendered to the game of narration:"[25]

> At some points, the "creative reproduction" of the story simply becomes the creation of the story. This is how the reading of the past becomes the creation of the past. . . . Through narration (which here means the simultaneous reading and writing of the past, the text of heritage) the distinctions between narrator and narrated . . . , between past and present, break down. We are left with an inextricable dialectics which implies interdependence: both the present and the past, the heir and the heritage, the reader and the text participate in the creation of themselves and each other.[26]

This phenomenon is most dramatically seen when Quentin and Shreve "merge" with Henry and Bon in Chapter Eight, and Végsö's reading of what happens here is illuminating. However, I would suggest that this process can be seen as occurring right through the novel: that behind the games of the narrators lies another, of the same nature and yet more pervasive through its scale, played by the text and the reader, in which *Absalom, Absalom!*'s narrative players are themselves the pieces. If the empirical status of Thomas Sutpen, as text, is chronically uncertain, then so, ultimately, is that of his readers.

Some early reviews of *Absalom, Absalom!,* clearly unwilling to consider it on the terms suggested by the book itself, accuse Faulkner of a stylistic failure to realise the characters of his individual narrators: Philip Rahv bemoans a story told by "servile narrators who all speak in the same voice, the monotonous and sorrowful voice of the author's contemplation of his world,"[27] while William Troy claims that everything in the novel is constrained by Faulkner's "intensely personal vision. Despite the elaborate orchestration . . . the voice that we hear throughout is always the same . . . rhythm and vocabulary are

identical . . ."[28] Such narrow readings of Faulkner's use of language during this period are rendered somewhat obsolete by the intervening decades of Faulkner criticism and literary theory, but it is this very narrowness that makes these views interesting. Far from constricting either character or story, the very linguistic "limitation" that these reviews identify is what marks the freeing of voice: what is seen as a damagingly singular vision is, in textual terms at least, rather the result of the exact opposite. *Absalom, Absalom!* is constructed of voice upon voice upon voice speaking simultaneously and eternally, layered not on top of one another, but rather in and around and through each other, voices that merge and mingle together to the point that they release themselves from any one discernible speaker and take on creative life of their own. That the narrators' voices often appear to be constructed through recognisably Faulknerian diction and structure is not, when one considers the novelistic purpose behind their apparent similarity, a sign of technical weakness, but rather Faulkner's virtuosity in controlling his theme. Rather than the overbearing omniscience that these early reviews accuse the author of using to the point of dehumanising his characters, what actually occurs is a transcription of narrative itself, built up from its numerous sources and unified in the consciousness of Quentin Compson and, of course, the reader.

The simplest narrative situation in the novel is that on the very first page, for it is here that the process of dialogic accumulation begins. Even this, however, is imbued with the multiple voices that will come to shape and create the story. The book opens with a description seeped in the long sentences and compound words familiar from Faulkner's earlier novels, but the illusion of any omniscient authority on the part of this authorial voice is soon dissipated when we realise that what is being described is a complex of readings. More than just a simple account of a young man being forced to hear a bitter old woman's rambling reminiscences, the scene is immediately populated by mingling and conflicting elements, not least in the persons of Quentin, the audience within the novel, and the "ghost" speaking to him:

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

> was—the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople, in notlanguage, like this: *It seems that this demon—his name was Sutpen—(Colonel Sutpen)—Colonel Sutpen. . . . Without regret, Miss Rosa Coldfield says—(Save by her) Yes, save by her. (And by Quentin Compson) Yes. And by Quentin Compson.*[29]

So the already claustrophobic environment of the "dim hot airless room"[30] is shown to be populated by innumerable "ghosts" from the past that Quentin and Miss Rosa share, prominently including Sutpen himself. What is more, Quentin enters this ghostly community himself through his transformation into separate elements within it, "two separate Quentins" that become an essential part of the dialectic process not only between past and present but in the surrounding, shadowy arena of "notlanguage" and "notpeople." Faulkner makes his ploy clear here—indeed, he explicitly comments upon his *transcription* of the conversation between the two Quentins: "like this:." At moments like this, the authorial voice has a similar role to that in *The Sound and the Fury,* setting down the psychological situation that it finds in a given scene, which is no less delicately handled here than in the intense narrative constructions of voice in the earlier book's first three sections. Indeed, Faulkner's presence is not so different from that in Quentin's section of *The Sound and the Fury* as it may initially appear, for Quentin is constantly present through the telling of the story, and in the context of *Absalom, Absalom!* that means that he is *always* present, whether in 1909 or 1865. The narratives in *The Sound and the Fury* are far from conventional accounts given by the characters who ostensibly narrate them, and we can see a similar hijacking of form here. The authorial voice seems to hover in Quentin's consciousness, not identical with it but party to it, and the novel as it progresses is essentially constructed of pure narrative, as received and processed by Quentin and the various voices within him, his own and others'.

In fact, for a novel so replete with intensely subjective personalities, the marked quality of the authorial voice, whether presented as such or not, is its essentially blank manner—elaborate diction notwithstanding. Even when it appears to be the only narrative voice in operation, most obviously in the first pages of Chapter Two, what initially appears to be an objective account is in fact no more than reportage: the vague details of Sutpen's arrival in Yoknapatawpha are delivered in terms of what "the town" is aware of. The sentences are full of qualifications, even in places where we might not even sense the need for them, displaying a historian's need to contextualise oracular contribution with "facts:"[31]

> So that in the next four weeks (Jefferson was a village then: the Holston House, the courthouse, six stores, a blacksmith and livery stable, a saloon frequented by drovers and peddlers, three churches and perhaps thirty residences) the stranger's name went back and forth among the places of business and of idleness and among the residences in steady strophe and antistrophe: *Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen.*[32]

This is an intriguing mixture of bare statistic and transcription of ghostly voices, awkwardly juxtaposed apparently at random, but despite this multi-levelled approach there is nothing approximating authority here. Nor is Sutpen's dramatic entrance even placed here by decree of the reporting voice: we are following the thoughts, whether explicit or otherwise, of Quentin Compson as he reflects upon what he has been told by Miss Rosa. This is not to say that the authorial voice's presence in the narrative is unimportant: even in the first chapter, as Miss Rosa gives her partial account to Quentin, we are constantly aware of an ordering, editing element. This serves to draw attention to the polyphonic nature of proceedings, allowing no voice to be dominant but each to be constitutive, Miss Rosa, Quentin and the authorial voice constantly undermining each others' authority. In this manner, the authorial voice even gives us details that we find later to be untrue: Quentin, we are told, imagines a "fading and ancient photograph" of the Sutpens "arranged into the conventional family group of the period . . . a group the last member of which had been dead twenty-five years . . ."[33] With Quentin's meeting with Henry later that evening, revealed to the reader at the end of the novel, this is shown to be a misleading detail: the Sutpens are not all dead at this stage. This raises important questions about narrative reliability. If the authorial voice were truly omniscient, as those early reviews suggest, then it would in this instance be lying needlessly. If, however, we see it as transcribing here the imagination of Quentin himself, then the false lead we are given is not only valid but appropriate: neither the authorial voice nor the central narrative consciousness of Quentin can be considered reliable, but the image summoned up here through their intermingling remains a created "truth," an attribute of the story for the greater part of the novel. This, then, is an early, subtle creation of truth through the combination of voices: in this instance, the effect is primarily registered in the reader of *Absalom, Absalom!* itself, but as the novel progresses we see the narrative enactment of this phenomenon within Quentin as well.

This becomes apparent when Quentin's father ostensibly takes over the narration. With Miss Rosa's gothic-tinged voice still resounding in Quentin's, and the reader's, mind, Mr. Compson begins to add his own—only at no stage can we truthfully say that it is purely his. He has been told

the story by his own father General Compson, Sutpen's closest friend in Jefferson, and as we find out later, neither has been told the whole story. Mr. Compson projects elements of his character onto his already at least third-hand account, and Quentin is shown to consider and comment upon what his father says. The relation of the authorial voice to Mr. Compson is variable. When he takes over the story halfway through Chapter Two, his speech is still marked as such, as was Miss Rosa's earlier on: here, at least, his voice would seem to be largely his own. It is worth noting that Mr. Compson's account begins with the beginnings of Sutpen's transformation into a public antihero, and the narrative is peppered with quotations of source, as though to emphasise the vitality of individual readings in Sutpen's creation: "I have this from something your grandfather let drop one day and which he doubtless had from Sutpen himself in the same accidental fashion . . ."[34] This, then, is the dubious authority upon which we are to gain our knowledge.

In Chapter Three, Mr. Compson's voice takes over the narration more completely, no longer denoted by speech-marks but given the text to himself; only occasionally does an italicised, authorial stage-direction like "*Mr. Compson said again*" interject, marked as other, outside the speech-dominated narrative.[35] Again, we need to consider this change in tone: why does Mr. Compson become more dominant in this way? He has a detachment from Sutpen's story that Miss Rosa does not have, and is by inclination, if not necessarily ability, more of a social commentator than she is; therefore, he might be considered a more able narrator of this part of the tale. But this simple explanation does not suffice. What we really face here is the first extended example within the text itself of what has already begun to occur within the reader's mind with the conjunction of voices encountered thus far. One must consider whether this is wholly Mr. Compson speaking: his voice seems to be slyly appropriated into a greater narrative purpose. This is evinced both by the ever-increasing "literariness" of the diction, already present in Mr. Compson's account, leading to very "writerly" sentence structure:

> Because the time now approached (it was 1860, even Mr. Coldfield probably admitted that war was unavoidable) when the destiny of Sutpen's family which for twenty years now had been like a lake welling from quiet springs into a quiet valley and spreading . . . felt the first subterranean movement toward the outlet, the gorge which would be the land's catastrophe too, and the four peaceful swimmers turning suddenly to face one another, not yet with alarm or distrust but just alert, feeling the dark set, none of them yet at that point where man looks about at his companions in disaster and thinks *When will I try to stop*

> *trying to save them and save only myself?* And not even aware that that point was approaching.[36]

The bracketed echoes of authorial reportage discussed above resound here, as do Faulkner's obsessive concern with "the land's catastrophe" and ability minutely to construct a scene or psychological scenario through what it is not. The urge to see parallels with the pool image attributed to Quentin is hard to resist; this is something other than a purely spoken voice from one narrator. Mr. Compson's sentiments and lack of certainty are still there, recognisable from the previous chapter, and he is still present as a story-telling force, but the subtle effect of the increasingly authorial edge to his language is to lodge the notion of merging voices in the reader's mind.

That this is not simply a case of clumsiness in character-creation on Faulkner's part is evinced by the deliberate formal shift, removing speech from the marked otherness of the earlier chapters and allowing it fully to constitute the narrative. As readers, we are now more thoroughly enmeshed in the actions of the narrative itself; the external world, the circumstances of the telling, are marked as exterior by being italicised and largely absent from the text. As ever in Faulkner's work, italicisation is important here, a vital indicator as to purpose and to the extent to which the reader must work. In *Absalom, Absalom!,* italics have variable design, the only proviso being that they signify a state of "otherness" in what is being said, be it minor authorial interjections or a voice from the past such as Bon's letter (or Mr. Compson's own letter in the latter half of the book). Most commonly, italics signal mental processes that are aside from any speech being currently spoken, and are other than the direct import of what is being told at that time.

The most overt example of this use of italicisation is Miss Rosa's second account, amounting to nearly forty pages of italicised text. This is a turning point in many ways, and represents a culmination of all the voices we have heard so far. This is ostensibly Miss Rosa talking, but on the basis of their use elsewhere, the italics must make us consider it anew; this is given further credence by the section's position in Chapter Five. The substance of what is said here was delivered to Quentin directly after Miss Rosa's account in the first chapter, as is indicated by the demand that Quentin "*mark how the wisteria, sun-impacted on this wall here, distils and penetrates this room as though (light unimpeded) by secret and attritive progress from mote to mote of obscurity's myriad components,*"[37] linking it with the pervasive scent of wisteria in the earlier scene. Therefore, there are elements here that Quentin was aware of while being spoken to by his father. Miss Rosa's words earlier in the afternoon have been put through the creative filter of Quentin's mind, merged with his own

reflections and Mr. Compson's contributions and vocal embellishments—subtly indicated by the repeated use of the word "*doubtless*" here that so marked Mr. Compson's "own" accounts. If this were purely Miss Rosa's voice—or, as the early reviews might suggest, purely the author's over-dominant one—then there would be little reason other than empty formal exercise for placing it here, and it would not be in italics, for Rosa's few clear words are recalled in roman type at the end of the chapter.

We are not given any explicit direction as to when this most overt merging of voices takes place in Quentin's consciousness, but that it does represent a kind of culmination is also shown by the fact that the next chapter removes the present scene to Harvard in 1910. With the arrival of his father's letter giving the news of Miss Rosa's death and the burning of Sutpen's Hundred and its remaining inhabitants, Quentin has now been given all the information he will have. Following on from the cue of Miss Rosa's italicised "voice," we are now subject to Quentin's thoughts as to the manner in which we receive the rest of the story. The reader of the novel is now in a position not dissimilar to that of Shreve, to whom Quentin gives his account of voices that we have been privy to beforehand, and of others that we now hear for the first time. This signals a subtle change in our relationship with the material. As regards the legend as it grows from here, we must consider that Quentin now tells everything, albeit with the important contributions of his friend. Matters become paradoxically both less certain and more so at the same time. From this point, the reader's role of construction and the acknowledgement of the lack of an all-pervading authority is increasingly brought to our attention. Quentin's speech—and it is, at least at first, clearly marked as such—is full of qualifications like "Grandfather said," words that themselves have been given to him by his father, and which are subject to the machinations of multiple narrators. However, concurrent with this ever-increasing uncertainty as to the "truthfulness" of the tale as it unfolds is a more intense identification of what is actually occurring in the reading and writing process and the relative roles of those involved—including ourselves.

In this latter half, the novel becomes more overtly a study of reader-writer relations, more crucially an analysis of the mutual construction of truths. As such, the relative positions of Faulkner, Sutpen, Quentin, Shreve, and ourselves, are thrown into dramatic focus. If the novel up to this point has effectively enacted the development of a narrative in terms of its construction within a major character's mind, the remainder basically consists of literary criticism, taken to an extreme extent. Quentin, party to all the available information, tells Shreve the story as he sees it, and as such "creates" the text of Sutpen in his own fashion. Accordingly, we have a situation in which

Quentin is reading Sutpen, and simultaneously *writing* him for Shreve, who, needless to say, reads and writes him anew; this culminates in the ultimate merging of Sutpen text and reader in Chapter Eight, which I shall discuss more fully in due course. First, however, we need to consider Quentin's emergence as the interpretive centre within *Absalom, Absalom!,* and the position this puts both Sutpen and ourselves in.

In the relationship between Quentin Compson and Thomas Sutpen, we have at once the most complex and the purest collaboration to be found in Faulkner's work, and through the direct correlation to be found with our own relationship with the author and text, the whole process of reading is interrogated and the distance between "world" and "work" negated. Quentin's readership, like that of his co-narrators, has related to the text/identity of Sutpen in the manner suggested by Holland's psychoanalytic theories, infusing the Sutpen text with his own unique identity, and thereby creating it anew with his reading. Holland's ideas go a long way towards explaining the constructive effects of the various narrators on the Sutpen legend(s), but we are perhaps entitled to enquire as to where Sutpen's text itself is, if anywhere, in this writerly mass.

In its abstract form Holland's argument essentially removes the text itself from the equation, siting the dominant motivations entirely in the reader: this is also a facet of Fish's view, discussed earlier. The latter half of *Absalom, Absalom!,* while still attending closely (probably more than ever) to the processes described by Holland and Fish, does, however, also bring back into consideration the status of the text and, indeed, the author of that text. Because Quentin is custodian of the readings of numerous other narrators as well as his own, and because of the complex merging of these readings and narrative voices in his consciousness, we are surely dealing with something more than the singular constructive actions by readers so far considered. This is not to discount the singularity and vitality of those readings in their original state, but the fact that they themselves have become party to similar consideration in their relation to Quentin does render them in need of some contextualisation. What we see here is simply too complex a situation to be adequately explained by such wholly reader-oriented theories.

Wolfgang Iser's theory of reading, as explored in "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response,* at first seems to tread a middle ground between Walker Gibson's formalism and Fish's and Holland's extreme concentration upon the reader, for while he stresses the reader's vital importance, his focus is rather upon what we can take the work itself to be:

> The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader—though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified with either the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader.[38]

While granting the importance of those processes given prominence by Holland and Fish, Iser is insistent upon contextualising them with his suggestion of the "virtual dimension" between text and reader.[39] The text itself is, in effect, reborn here as a vital component in the equation that "imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these becoming too blurred and hazy,"[40] but which has no dynamic character until the reader "sets the work in motion."[41] The virtual dimension at the centre of Iser's theory is especially pertinent to the situation we see in the second half of *Absalom, Absalom!,* and the manner in which it is brought about mirrors Faulkner's portrayal of reader-writer relations in the novel.

The virtual dimension, rather than either the written text itself or the reader alone, that constitutes the work is the product of a constantly dynamic process that is directly linked to what the text does not tell us: the "gaps" that force us to activate our own critical and creative faculties:

> . . . one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed. By making his decision he implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text; at the same time it is this inexhaustibility that forces him to make his decision.[42]

It need hardly be pointed out by this stage that we have seen individual readers filling in the gaps throughout *Absalom, Absalom!* so far, or, as Holland puts it, seeking a "coherence and significance that satisfies." More fundamentally, however, and especially in the later chapters, the novel brings to the fore that very "inexhaustibility" from which the readings themselves are drawn. While Quentin is painfully aware of his own decision-making processes, and those of his co-narrators, his most important narrative step is

his recognition that, to quote Iser, "the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realizations."[43]

Iser, as with all the theorists I have discussed in relation to Yoknapatawpha, is concerned primarily with the relationship between the text and its reader; with regard to the relationship between, for instance, myself and *Absalom, Absalom!,* we may be forced to recognise the "potential text" as just that: an unrealisable ideal. But the narrative voice as presented *within* this novel comes very close to realising, if not the potential text itself, than at least its potentiality. Throughout, we have been party to individual decisions as to how the gaps in the Sutpen text are to be filled, just as we have simultaneously carried out such operations with regard to the text of *Absalom, Absalom!:* in making the variation of interpretation its focus, the novel itself thereby forces us to recognise the inexhaustibility of the text on two counts. The merging of voices that I have described, as well as in itself being "set in motion" in the mind of the reader, represents the very same process within the work itself: by the time Quentin and Shreve come to engage in their extreme interaction with the Sutpen text, the potential text is in active operation.

As far as Quentin himself is concerned, the various readings he has heard and considered amount to a process of continual *re*reading, a process that Iser posits as crucial to our awareness of the potential text even as we acknowledge our inability to attain it. Following Iser, with each rereading we have different knowledge and will therefore adopt a different approach to the text: being aware of events after those we may be focusing on at any given time, we are apt to engage in "advance retrospection," wherein our control over the temporal flow of the text becomes constructive in itself.[44] After repeated readings, therefore, our awareness of the inexhaustible potential text is all the greater because of our necessarily greater involvement with it: such is the case with Quentin and the Sutpen text.

But if Quentin in many ways is correlative to the reader, Shreve must also be considered in a similar, though subtly different light. He ostensibly has access to as much information about Sutpen as we do, in that he has access to Quentin. But his viewpoint cannot be the same as Quentin's, even if he is told every available "fact" in the case: unlike Quentin and ourselves, Shreve does not experience the accumulation of voices as they lead up to this point. What *he* is able to read is Quentin's own version of the accumulation, which necessarily includes Quentin's further rereading during the telling. Whereas Quentin has gained increasing awareness and interaction with the potential Sutpen text, Shreve himself, through his late arrival in the readership and limited source of information, receives it as a singular reading of the

text, albeit one of unusual depth and complexity. But Shreve is a good, if irreverent, student, and in turn adds his own perspective to the mix, that of the interested but frequently amused outsider: indeed, his slightly caricaturic summation of the story as a battle between a "Faustus" and his "Creditor" lends an element of cynical comic relief to the tale.[45] And if Shreve, within *Absalom, Absalom!*, relates to Quentin in a similar way to ourselves—he reads the reader and the reader's text—then his position between Quentin and the reader of the novel renders him a surprisingly complex narrative element in himself, especially as he adds his own unique reading to Quentin's and their writerly collaboration increases.[46]

The joining of Quentin and Shreve with Henry and Bon must be considered as a multi-layered process even before we discuss what happens within it. As I have hinted, Quentin effectively figures as the text that Shreve engages with; reading the Sutpen text and its various other readers, and in doing so writing them, Quentin himself takes on the form of the text when it comes to the next reader in line, to be read and written anew by Shreve. Through the presence of Shreve in *Absalom, Absalom!* as, in effect, a usurper of Quentin's role as ultimate reader, the distinction between text and reader is finally collapsed altogether, as Quentin and the Sutpen text become as one. Thus, as we have seen Quentin as occupying our own position within the novel, so we must now recognise Shreve as doing so to an even greater degree, as he takes over both the Quentin/Sutpen text *and* our reading of it. We therefore find ourselves in the paradoxical situation of being both "further out," in that we have had our accustomed position usurped twice, and simultaneously much more involved in the text itself, as we are effectively represented twice within it by readers whose own autonomy from the text has been wholly or partly compromised.

At this stage, we can perhaps say that the distinction I have been making between *Absalom, Absalom!* (the text) and "the Sutpen text" (the text within the text) itself collapses, as the lines between Sutpen, his reader-narrators, their ultimate reader, *his* reader, and ourselves have disappeared. Chapter Eight represents the fullest extent to which *Absalom, Absalom!* dramatises the utter identification of text and reader discussed by the likes of Iser, and goes much further in both purpose and effect. As Quentin, Shreve, Henry and Bon become "the two the four the two" existing throughout the text whether in Mississippi in 1865 or Massachusetts in 1910,[47] the bracketed italic section in which Sutpen's ultimate repudiation of Bon is created is the product of their merging, effecting the communion of all the voices we have encountered through the novel. This is, in effect, the purest narrative voice in the book, utterly disembodied and myriad. As such this represents living

text, in which all involved parties and their individual concerns are constituent parts, our identities temporarily becoming synonymous with it (though certainly not, as Gibson might have it, rendered irrelevant in themselves). If we can never fully realise Iser's potential text, this seminal point in *Absalom, Absalom!* represents such a manifestation of textual possibility that we, Quentin, Sutpen and the rest at least get the chance to inhabit it for a while. At this moment of complete absorption of all parties, the novel goes beyond even its own radical dramatisation of our activities when reading: as the potential readings we bring to it as readers merge with those within the novel, *Absalom, Absalom!* and every element associated with it becomes a manifestation of its own inexhaustible potential text.

Absalom, Absalom!'s fictionality is intense: *everything* here is writing and reading, and in its utter identification of creation *within* the world of the text with our creation *of* the world of the text, we can perhaps see an extreme example of Bakhtin's "continual mutual interaction" between "work" and "world." The reading of this novel requires us to co-create a world in which exactly the same thing happens, and these concurrent processes are shown to operate on such perpetual, infinitely multiple and minutely interactive terms that work and world become impossible to distinguish. Through putting into practice the very sameness of the reading and writing of texts and people, as discussed by Holland, we are made to realise the extent to which our reading is, to quote Iser, "closely akin to the way in which we gather experience in life. And thus the 'reality' of the reading experience can illuminate basic patterns of real experience . . ."[48] As well as being the very substance of *Absalom, Absalom!,* this principle has crucial import as regards both Yoknapatawpha itself and the "real world." Yoknapatawpha, as we see here, is a world in which history, event and character are created through reading and writing; as a fictional construct, it is brought about by exactly the same processes in the "real world." If we accept the manner of the county's creation as suggested here, then surely we must recognise that, like our counterparts in Yoknapatawpha, we mutually co-create our own lives in a similar fashion. I would suggest that a major accomplishment of *Absalom, Absalom!* is to bring about this recognition, and to make a case thereby not only for the importance of fictional practice, but for fiction's intrinsic role in life as we live it.

Chapter Eight

Interested Parties and Theorems to Prove: Snopeswatching

The intensity of the reader-writer relations explored in *Absalom, Absalom!* is never matched in the rest of Faulkner's work—never again is the experience of readers *of* the fiction so analogous to, or rather inextricably involved in, the experience of readers *within* it. Some may be tempted to explain this as Faulkner having essentially written himself out in the long and painful gestation of his greatest novel, and to see the rest of his career as a gradual cooling of the experimental heat in exchange for a more directly thematic, issue-related approach. For my part, if pressed I would agree that *Absalom, Absalom!* represents the finest single achievement of Faulkner's career, in part because of the extent of the investigations and explorations I have discussed, but also for many other reasons falling outside the remit of this study. However, one book's stature should not blind us to the importance of those that follow it, and it is worth remembering that no two Yoknapatawpha novels are written—or read—in the same way. If the complexities and responsibilities of readership are interrogated to their greatest extent in *Absalom, Absalom!,* the investigation nevertheless continues throughout the series. Having considered the readership of John Sartoris and Thomas Sutpen, this chapter will now do the same for the third of my major Yoknapatawpha writers, Flem Snopes, a figure whose life and actions provoke just as much attention as his precursors, attention that is just as crucial in the ongoing meditation upon the writerly creation of personality and environment.

It is useful to consider the readership of Flem, in *The Hamlet, The Town* and *The Mansion,* in the light of that of Thomas Sutpen, for various reasons. First of all, both of these figures can be usefully studied in terms of their relation to the "classic" myth of the Old South at least partially represented by John Sartoris. As we have seen, their responses to the mythical

constitution of their society are subtly different, though the differences in result are not so subtle. Their careers form pivotal chapters in the continuing history of Yoknapatawpha County itself. Perhaps most importantly in the present context, however, the work of both is subject to multiple readership within the fiction itself, readership that is shown to be vital both to *our* understanding of the characters, and to the essential make-up of their lives. Furthermore, the readership of each within the relevant fiction, can be related in different ways to our role as readers of the fiction and the characters.

Before embarking on a more detailed study of the modes of readership in the Snopes trilogy, it is worth considering the apparent parallels with the situation in *Absalom, Absalom!* Both Thomas Sutpen and Flem Snopes operate, in effect, as writers of texts, forms of myth that respond in differing ways to the more established myths of their time and place. As such, both are subject to intense narrative scrutiny within the novels of the Yoknapatawpha series and in turn by the series' readers. This process of readership and re-readership leads to a complex network of narrative construct, with, for instance, the Sutpen text existing somewhere in the relations between his construction of himself, his construction by the likes Quentin and Shreve within the novel, and our construction of him as we read *Absalom, Absalom!* and the existing accounts. In turning to the readership of Flem Snopes, we are faced with what initially seems to be a very similar situation, both in terms of the two men's individual roles in Yoknapatawphan society and history, and in terms of their reception. Flem's text, too, is subject to the machinations of numerous narrators and interpreters before it even gets to the stage of Faulkner's reader. On reading the trilogy, we must consider both Flem and the varying conceptions of him to be found in the narrative, these influences and interpretations having effects on the respective positions of both Flem and Faulkner's reader with regard to the text. In this process, as in *Absalom, Absalom!,* we are thereby required to recognise in figures within the book certain aspects analogous to our own. And it is here, as well as in the differences between Sutpen's and Snopes's actions, that the important interpretive differences between the two lie.

If *Absalom, Absalom!*'s narrative complexity is never achieved (or desired?) again, this is no reason to discount the range of interpretive strategy applied to Flem. On the most basic level, of course, he provides the central focus for three novels, as opposed to Sutpen's one, albeit three novels whose concentration wanders somewhat. Each of these books takes a different narrative approach. *The Hamlet* is delivered by an authorial voice, though it is one that is frequently inhabited by the eager contributions of others, most

notably V. K. Ratliff. As ever with Faulkner's use of such a voice, its own position can never be taken for granted—it would be a mistake, for instance, to assume omniscience in any Faulkner narrative, however external the voice may seem. *The Town* apparently goes to the other extreme, being entirely constructed of the first-person accounts of Ratliff, Charles Mallison, and Gavin Stevens. These three also figure prominently in the narration of *The Mansion,* but are joined here by an authorial voice in certain sections of the story—prominently those featuring two of Flem's most directly constructive (or, perhaps, *de*structive) readers, Mink and Linda Snopes, who themselves are never given narrative voices of their own. These general, novel-wide narrative set-ups each have very distinct effects on the material that they deal with, even before we consider subtleties within them.

It might almost be tempting, for instance, to liken the narrative basis of *The Hamlet* to that of *Absalom, Absalom!,* in that it is a story told by an authorial voice that is frequently invaded or even usurped by the voices of other narrators/characters. But we are prevented from doing so by the crucial point that, whereas Sutpen's interpreters work in terms of an historical and interpretive network that works through time at constructing the story of a man from the past, Flem's readers are contemporaneous with him. They are not, like Quentin and Shreve, attempting to piece together a text from "the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking,"[1] but rather trying to understand and come to terms with a man they live and develop with, in whose story they can become involved at the level of action as well as interpretation. Whereas Quentin and Shreve create through narrative the circumstances in which the Sutpen drama can unfold, even to the extent of apparently merging with it as they become "the two the four the two,"[2] Gavin Stevens, for instance, can try through money and warning to prevent the murder of his long-time foe, Flem Snopes, thereby becoming an important part of the events described as well as of their description. This, as we shall see, is vital to the nature of the understanding and construction of Flem, such as it is, that we get across the trilogy, and asks important questions about the closeness of a text to its readership that can—indeed, must, if we are to do the work justice—be broadened out to bear upon, for instance, our relationship with Faulkner as time passes and we leave the myth of the Old South further and further behind.[3]

As with my discussion of readership in and of *Absalom, Absalom!,* my approach here will not consist primarily of character-studies of the narrators. My discussion of Flem's readership will largely progress along the terms outlined above: considering the manner in which the novels' respective readers and readings are presented formally, and the importance of the readerships'

particular relationship to the text, as well as what conclusions can be drawn about our own textual roles from this. Some degree of character-analysis will inevitably be involved, but, again, my focus will be rather on the phenomenon of reading as *process,* as a vitally constructive element in the formation of life and event.

In the early stages of *The Hamlet,* Ratliff takes over the narrative to tell the tall tale of Ab Snopes and Pat Stamper. After many pages of the story, we suddenly and briefly leave Ratliff's voice and swing out to see the scene of its telling.

> "'Sho now,' Stamper says. 'That horse will surprise you.'
>
> "And it did," Ratliff said. He laughed, for the first time, quietly, invisible to his hearers though they knew exactly how he would look at the moment as well as if they could see him, easy and relaxed in his chair, with his lean brown pleasant shrewd face, in his faded clean blue shirt, with that same air of perpetual bachelorhood which Jody Varner had, although there was no other resemblance between them and not much here, since in Varner it was a quality of shabby and fustian gallantry where in Ratliff it was that hearty celibacy as of a lay brother in a twelfth-century monastery—a gardener, a pruner of vines, say. "That horse surprised us . . ."[4]

Ratliff is talking here to the apparently ever-present group of poor white Frenchman's Bend men assembled on the porch of Varner's store, a chorus with whom he is frequently seen and, more importantly, heard throughout the novel. Part of this passage's effect is to make us newly aware of this: it is important that we do not treat his rambling account in isolation, but rather as part of the scene in which its teller is present—one is reminded, perhaps, of Sutpen's telling of his early life by the fire during the hunt for the French architect. Ratliff's tale, his telling of it, is necessarily full of his readings, and this authorial step back in the middle of the narrative reminds us of its contingency. More than this, though, Faulkner carefully contextualises Ratliff himself here: he is presented in terms of his intimates, largely through that familiar Faulknerian technique of describing in the negative—they cannot see him, but we are treated to their understanding of how he looks despite this. This also represents one of the great achievements of the narrative voice in *The Hamlet,* as well as sections of *The Mansion,* in that it subtly but inextricably combines the chorus's thoughts and interpretations with the diction and broader world-view of the authorial voice. Factual description is tinged with slight value judgments, (Ratliff's "lean brown pleasant shrewd face")

and wilfully speculative analogy ("a gardener, a pruner of vines, say") that serve to accommodate the views of Ratliff's audience at the same time as allowing authorial freedom to suggest. This in turn reminds us that the interactivity between Ratliff as writer/reader and his audience, and between Faulkner and ourselves, are essentially engagements in the same process.[5]

This passage is typical of much the handling of material in *The Hamlet,* and is itself contextualised and qualified a little later when we are told of Will Varner's first encounter with Flem:

> Then at last, on Friday afternoon, Will Varner himself appeared. Perhaps it was for this Ratliff and his companions had been waiting. But if it was, it was doubtless not Ratliff but the others who even hoped that anything would divulge here. So it was very likely Ratliff alone who was not surprised, since what did divulge was the obverse of what they might have hoped for; it was not the clerk who now discovered at last whom he was working for, but Will Varner who discovered who was working for him.[6]

Again, what could be a simple description of a meeting of two people is turned into a multi-levelled analysis of the scene in all its narrative relevance. Everything is couched in uncertainty here—even the uncertainty. The authorial voice gives us a detailed and indeed plausible account of the porch-chorus's thinking, while at the same time registering Ratliff's at least partial distinction from them, and even goes further to posit probable ramifications of the meeting of expectation and event. But despite the description of the scene through fine psychological detail, it is undercut throughout by acknowledgement of the portrait's own basis in supposition. At first glance, this kind of writing seems a long way from the intense interiority of, for example, *The Sound and the Fury* and parts of *Absalom, Absalom!,* wherein we gain access to individuals' thought-patterns, and partake in their fictive construction. Surely the very uncertainty of the voice pertaining to be authorial sets it at the opposite end of the scale as a voice so *ex*terior that precise understanding is impossible, and indeed recognised as such? But closer analysis suggests that, in fact, something rather similar is occurring, but seen from another perspective. For all the sophistication of their presence in their respective novels, the dominant characteristic of such earlier Faulknerian voices is their utter subjectivity and, therefore, their inability to do anything further than speculate, however constructively, upon the scene or people occupying them. In this passage from *The Hamlet,* the subtly ironic use of the word "doubtless" hauntingly echoes the same word's use as a leitmotif in

Absalom, Absalom!, wherein it registers attempts by narrators (principally Mr. Compson) to validate what is, pointedly, full of doubt. The assertion of certainty points to the very lack of it. *Absalom, Absalom!*'s narrators apply their creative powers to a set of people and circumstances, and the very dynamic of the novel as a whole is in the interactivity and tension between the varying accounts, into the middle of which interpretive mass Faulkner and the reader trek. Here, the tone of the authorial voice rather suggests that it is in a similar position to those narrative voices: like the relationship of Quentin to Sutpen, the relationship of the authorial voice—and the reader—to the chorus is one founded on a series of assumptions, explorations, deductions, and presentations in a hopefully coherent form. If the dominant narrative mode is exterior here, we are asked to remember that this is *necessarily* so, and that for all the turmoil of internalised subjectivity in such books as *Absalom, Absalom!,* the readers themselves are in the same position as this authorial voice—all they can do is read, however "doubtlessly," and it is their readings that become the written story. If a major effect of *Absalom, Absalom!* is to assert the analogous natures of readers and writers within and of texts by entering into the readings themselves, then passages such as this do a similar thing from the other side. We observe Ratliff and the chorus reading the Snopes text, but our own necessary uncertainty with regard to reading *them* reminds us of the doubt at every level from writer to character to narrator to reader. The chief difference, as determined by the perspective, is that in the earlier book this doubt is literally enacted, whereas here it is described. This may not have the same degree of narrative ingenuity or technical daring as *Absalom, Absalom!,* but it does represent an engagement with its writerly concerns, and even serves to throw a further element of contingency into the equation.

This represents a double-edged narrative approach, with the use of free indirect discourse with characters or groups, most poignantly and parodically used in the astonishing romance of Ike and the cow, interspersed with wider-angled meditations upon problems of social and personal readership. Adding to this the heady element of conversation, *The Hamlet* is steeped in what Richard Gray has called "narrative plenitude."[7] "The talking of the people of Frenchman's Bend," Gray continues, is

> . . . a system of verbal collusion that implies its own gaps and omissions. . . . The talking that incorporates and surrounds these people—that is, the talking of *The Hamlet* as a whole—is something quite different: an exchange of voices which challenges the idea that any relationship is fixed and stable, and invites us to see all relationships—between, say, character and narrator and reader, or personality and

> environment—as existing in a medium of change. The problem with the inhabitants of Frenchman's Bend is precisely that they see their world as set firm and authorized. This prevents them from appreciating that Flem Snopes, involved in the process of history just as they are, is both like and unlike them.[8]

This presence within the text of different levels of "talking" brings to mind certain dynamics of *The Sound and the Fury,* wherein voices form and are formed by personal conceptions of truth, while our privileged position as reader allows us to witness and experience the instability of the relationships between them. The perspective is different here, however, this relationship existing within the text itself between the varying levels of voice, while we constitute another stage. And while the voices in the earlier novel were striking for their painful isolation, their intermingling rather a process of invasion only realised at the level of our readership, here they form a kind of linguistic foundation for such fragile social cohesion as exists in the village. Seen in this light, Frenchman's Bend's "verbal collusion" works as a dramatisation of Stanley E. Fish's idea of an "interpretive community." Fish introduces this concept to attempt to explain how anyone ever manages to agree about a text, or how one reader can adopt such different approaches in relation to different texts, given the degree of interpretive individualism he posits as intrinsic to the reading/writing process, as discussed previously. An interpretive community consists of "those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions."[9] They are essentially temporary and unstable, as people's attitudes change, and amount to a transient, contrived barrier,

> . . . between an impossible ideal and the fear which leads so many to maintain it. The ideal is of perfect agreement and it would require texts to have a status independent of interpretation. The fear is of interpretive anarchy, but it would only be realized if interpretation (text-making) were completely random. It is the fragile but real consolidation of interpretive communities that allows us to talk to one another, but with no hope or fear of ever being able to stop.[10]

One certainly gets the feeling that the incessant talkers of Frenchman's Bend have "no hope or fear of ever being able to stop." Of course, they have no conception of themselves as an interpretive community—as Gray points out, their problem is that "they see their world as set firm and authorized," that

they view the world in a particular way because that is the way it is. The "exchange of voices" that constitutes the narrative as a whole enables us to see the fallacy of this, to experience all relationships as part of a "medium of change." And perhaps the biggest effect of Flem Snopes's rise is that he exposes the contrived and transient nature of any such community, making clear the arrogance, however unconscious, of such prescriptive assumption. Whereas the narrative framework clearly contextualises this interpretive community for us, juxtaposing its conception of itself with its position in the wider scheme of things, Flem effectively forces such a realisation upon the talkers themselves. Consequently, *The Hamlet* consists not just of Flem Snopes's early rise, but also a study of the "gaps and omissions" that exist and develop between a readership that would assume none such to exist, and the crises that arise when acknowledgement is forced. Again, then, Faulkner takes essential processes of readerly-writerly construction and makes them a crucial part of the fiction itself.

If the Frenchman's Bend interpretive community's lack of self-awareness, their apparently unquestioning acquiescence with what they take the world to be, renders them pliable components in the dominating power of Will Varner, then the shock that Flem represents and the crises that accompany it at least serve to make them aware of this, regardless of the turmoil caused. If, as Fish states, such a community's interpretive strategies "exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around," then Flem effectively challenges their right to be so paradoxically deterministic and unaware of being so.[11] The broader conception of *The Hamlet,* as it develops, allows us to see the chorus both as a mass and as a collection of individuals with individual concerns, but the degree to which this distinction is recognised varies through the text.[12]

If the shift in narrative tone upon beginning *The Town* seems extreme at first, with its use of three narrators to deliver the whole novel, then Charles Mallison immediately makes an issue of the kind of audience responsibilities alluded to in the apparent omniscience of *The Hamlet.* In a text that frequently seems to offer an overly prescriptive account of Snopesism, Charles's accounts to some extent reflect the novel's consideration of its own practices, and show that the text is far from ignorant of its contingencies. Indeed, Charles starts the novel by discussing the potential "narrative plenitude" that exists in the background to his and his co-narrators' readings of Flem, an active consideration of the means by which information reaches its source:

> I wasn't born yet so it was Cousin Gowan who was there and big enough to see and remember and tell me afterward when I was big

> enough for it to make sense. That is, it was Cousin Gowan plus Uncle Gavin or maybe Uncle Gavin plus Cousin Gowan. . . . / "Us" was Grandfather and Mother and Father and Uncle Gavin then. So this is what Gowan knew about it until I got born and big enough to know about it too. So when I say "we" and "we thought" what I mean is Jefferson and what Jefferson thought."[13]

Charles here undermines the authority of the storyteller from the outset: he will tell his side of the story, but he will not assume the godlike status that his uncle frequently does. Both his apparent humility as a narrator and his awareness of the difficulties inherent in the enterprise are apparent here, though he also asserts that despite his own absence from the early scenes, there necessarily *had* to be someone there to fill the narrative role, in this case his cousin. Immediately, however, Charles qualifies even this opening qualification with the consideration that readership of this stage of Flem's career perhaps belongs in greater or lesser part to his uncle as well, presumably both as a major character in the drama and as somebody who has related the events to him through his childhood. Already, we have a conscious undermining of narrative authority, as marked as that in *The Hamlet,* with both the story's origins and its telling subject to the blurring effect of being undefined and a process of amalgamation. Similarly, Charles's use of "we" to describe the town's reactions and actions is not the assumption of some sort of divine right over their collective consciousness, but rather his recognition of himself as a mutually constitutive product of this environment. Rather than speaking as a universal voice, Charles posits himself as part of a collective one; nevertheless, the awareness that this is a construct, a creation of Jefferson, is there from the start. This amounts, effectively, to an explicit recognition of an interpretive community, of which he is a member, directed towards the life of Flem Snopes. But, unlike *The Hamlet*'s porch-chorus, Charles seems fully alert to the ambiguities of his and his community's position: inherent in his opening disclaimers is an admission of Jefferson's authorial input, but also of its essentially unstable and transient nature in itself. If *The Hamlet* shows us from a relatively external position the shifting relationships between, for instance, character and narrator—as opposed to enacting them, as *Absalom, Absalom!* does—then *The Town* takes this one stage further by having its very narrators, the readers within the text, actively consider what they are doing and lay that consideration before us. While this is still, I would argue, a continuation of the kind of investigation begun in *Absalom, Absalom!,* the extent of the narrators' explicit consideration of their craft rather prevents the novel's reader performing such roles him or herself.

The Town's exclusive use of first-person narrative initially suggests a return to the techniques of certain earlier novels such as *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying,* but such explication rather quickly disabuses us of this.[14] Perhaps even more disarming, in this fashion, is that these first-person speakers directly address the reader. When Gavin Stevens delivers an aside such as "You see?" the reader is personally challenged without even the nominal implied audience within the text of, say, *The Reivers,* between the speaker and ourselves.[15] Paradoxically, this acknowledgement of the reader's existence, and the at least superficial appeal to his or her cognitive abilities, actually distances us from the events being shown. Whereas we effectively become Benjy for the duration of his narrative in *The Sound and the Fury,* here we are on the exterior, not only of the narrators but of everything they describe. The very ignorance of the reader on Benjy's part is what grants us our entrance; the narrators of *The Town,* and Gavin Stevens in particular, seem determined to keep us at arm's length. They provide us with a surplus of information, certainly, but ensure that it is information given rather than discovered independently. For their own part, the narrators actively consider *themselves* as readers of Flem Snopes, but our fate, it would seem, is to be readers only of the book in which he appears.

Gavin Stevens's narratives assert this most forcefully. As a reader, he is perpetually analysing his own role along with those of his subjects, but as regards his audience (us) he will allow no deviation from his own authorial interests. When he considers the possibilities surrounding Eula Varner's reaction to his ordering college catalogues for her daughter Linda, he posits as an aside, "(Oh yes, it had already occurred to me also that she had no reason whatever to assume I knew she had received the catalogues, let alone had instigated them. But I dismissed that as immediately as you will too if we are to get on with this.)"[16] Stevens not only acknowledges us but anticipates our thoughts and reactions, here answering our assumed unspoken interjection. He then tells us what to think: if "this" is to work, you had better follow my version of it. "This," of course, is a story, and such devices remind us of the necessarily fictive nature of what we are reading. True, Stevens's use of "we" does imply a collaborative effort, but nonetheless the boundaries are established between speaker, subject and audience. Involved though the narrators are in the action, both narrator and reader are outside the arena of the story, outside Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha. To a certain extent, we can see this as a dramatisation of Walker Gibson's distinctions between authors, speakers, readers and mock readers,[17] rather than the merging of readers' and writers' roles as seen by, for instance, Wolfgang Iser.

This principle is illustrated most dramatically by the most well-known passage in the novel, wherein Gavin Stevens surveys "all Yoknapatawpha in the dying last of day beneath you:"

> First is Jefferson, the center, radiating weakly its puny glow into space; beyond it, enclosing it, spreads the County, tied by the diverging roads to that center as is the rim to the hub by its spokes, yourself detached as God Himself for this moment above the cradle of your nativity and of the men and women who made you, the ripple and chronicle of your native land proffered for your perusal in ring by concentric ring like the ripples on living water above the dreamless slumber of your past; you to preside unanguished and immune above this miniature of man's passions and hopes and disasters . . .[18]

And so the world of the novel, the trilogy, and the series is set out before us. No harm will come to this tale's teller, Godlike detachment protecting him from the travails of the players in this "miniature" through which "you" can consider the lot of mankind. Creative power is absolute here: as "God," the storyteller is writing what he relays. Importantly, however, the awareness of readership within that writing is still paramount: "you" "peruse" as much as "preside" in "your" immunity. But for all Stevens's use of "you," this is rather a consideration of what it is to tell than an opportunity to join in the telling: the entire description of the scene is couched in his terms as an assumption, to the point of implied command, that we see things as he does, making this a view even more singular than that of an "I." He is using the audience to assert his writings as universal, even merging them together verbally as "you, the old man."[19] And yet, again, what is being considered here is essentially the actions carried out by the likes of Quentin Compson and the reader in *Absalom, Absalom!,* implicitly referred to through the shared metaphor of "ripples on living water." The vital difference is that neither Quentin nor the reader remain "unanguished and immune" in *Absalom, Absalom!,* for the act of readership there is one of mutual interaction with the text. According to Gavin Stevens, it is one of almost restful authority. What we are to make of this depends rather on one's point of view: do we bemoan it as a severe waning of technical skills on Faulkner's part, or do we rather see it as another take on the theme, one that places us firmly outside the action but still engages with the crucial issue of writerly creativity itself in a way that must make us question even such assumptions as we have made about, for instance, readership in and of *Absalom, Absalom!?* To my mind,

the interrogation of perspective evident throughout the trilogy would surely suggest the latter.

Stevens does not go unchecked, of course, and it would be a mistake to identify his aims too closely with those of Faulkner, for instance. His authority is frequently challenged by Ratliff and Charles Mallison, and the interplay between the three allows the novel the space in which to investigate more sensitively the processes of storytelling. As with Stevens's first appearance in the series, where he replays part of Joe Christmas's story to a friend in *Light in August,* his view is one among many. Faulkner plays the narrators off against each other, but in an almost exclusively linear fashion. Unlike the starkly clashing accounts juxtaposed in *The Sound and the Fury,* these narratives lead on from each other, often correcting each other as they go along. Sometimes they directly respond to each other: after Gavin's authorial-seeming rendering of Flem, Ratliff begins the following chapter with "No no, no no, no no. He was wrong," effectively dismissing the lengthy portrait and displaying awareness of both his audience and his fellow narrators.[20] Ratliff delivers quite a few of these rejoinders: "Because he missed it. He missed it completely" forms the whole of Chapter Nine.[21] As well as undermining the tendencies of any of them to assume absolute authority over the text of Flem Snopes, these interjections reinforce the sense of a story-telling session around the hearth that pervades the whole book.

The Mansion effects a merging of the approaches of the trilogy's previous two volumes, combining sections delivered by an authorial voice similar to that in *The Hamlet* with first-person narratives from *The Town*'s speakers, as well as one by Montgomery Ward Snopes—the only time a Snopes actually gets to speak for himself. But while this does provide a balance of sorts to the trilogy as a whole, it more importantly develops some of the possibilities suggested by the narrative considerations I have discussed. It is perhaps in reading this final instalment of the trilogy that we are most strongly forced to consider the relationship between narrator-reader and material, and to re-evaluate what has come before in this light. Indeed, the novel itself does this, frequently revisiting previously covered events, such as Mink's killing of Jack Houston and the resulting lifetime of imprisonment and pent-up resentment against Flem, but putting a different spin on them or even changing the details of what "happened." Faulkner adds a caveat to this novel, letting us know that he is aware of discrepancies between the various books of the series, putting them down to his writing a "living literature," work to which his own attitudes will necessarily change, as well as those of his characters.[22] We might put the apparently more sympathetic portrayal of Mink by *The Mansion*'s authorial voice down to such changes in Faulkner himself, but

even were this not the case we are surely identifying a technique that has been fundamental to much of the Yoknapatawpha series: the presentation of an event or individual from a variety of viewpoints resulting in a kaleidoscopic and myriad portrayal. In *The Hamlet,* Houston's murder is primarily presented, to remarkable effect, from the perspective of the slain man himself, with the resulting social view of Mink's behaviour coming across as generally negative. Here, however, the authorial voice follows Mink, much as it follows Ratliff or Ike in *The Hamlet,* for instance, and we thereby get a picture of him as an Everyman hero against the intimidating and all-pervading forces of "*Them,*" personified in such men as Houston and Flem.[23] I would suggest, therefore, that despite Faulkner's defensiveness and the apparent similarity of voice, we have no more cause to expect or desire "consistency" in the presentation of Mink than in that of Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*'s four sections. Where this *does* represent an appropriate consistency with *The Hamlet* is in again forcing consideration of the spaces between character, event and perspective: if *The Hamlet* shows the authorial voice as a reader of readers and readings, then this reminds us that even such views as these are contingent, that the view we have of Mink from *The Hamlet* can in no way be considered definitive but rather the product of a series of interpretations at various stages.

The sections of *The Mansion* that are delivered in the first-person also continue themes considered previously in *The Town.* Here, however, Ratliff is the most vocal theorist of reader-writer processes, and in discussing his own machinations as a creative reader of the ongoing Snopes scenarios he also offers candid observations upon the writerly presumptions of, for instance, Gavin Stevens and William Faulkner. In giving his version of the village boys' humiliation and jealousy over the union of Eula Varner and Hoake McCarron—a situation already familiar to us from *The Hamlet*—Ratliff considers one of the injured:

> . . . it was Theron Quick; for a week after it you could still see the print of that loaded buggy whip across the back of his skull; not the first time naming him Quick turned out to be what the feller calls jest a humorous allusion—laying cold in the weeds beside the road. And that's when I believe it happened. I don't even insist or argue that it happened that way. I jest simply decline to have it any other way except that one because there ain't no acceptable degrees between what has got to be right and what jest can possibly be.[24]

This passage is full not only of loaded references to recognisable scenes from the trilogy, but of slyly self-referential jokes about the meditations upon

readership throughout Faulkner's career. In the fictive terms of Yoknapatawpha itself, Quick is a family name like any other, and Ratliff is free to laugh about its inaptitude on these grounds alone. But in the wider sphere in which the county is a construct of the writers and readers of books, it is, of course, Faulkner who has decided both to name a particular character Quick, and to make it that character who ends up in the ditch—at least as far as we can gather from Ratliff. Ratliff himself, of course, is unaware of Faulkner, but is keenly alert to the humour in such an apparent half-wit being "named Quick"—the remark works both as the sort of literary in-joke we have encountered previously in *Absalom, Absalom!,* for instance, and as a Ratliffian aside on the spuriousness of creation. This would be rich enough in itself, but the creation motif is continued into Ratliff's analysis of his own interpretive actions. Having, in effect, referred to a godlike writerly force dictating events—a figure not unlike Gavin Stevens's conception of himself in *The Town*—he then goes on to identify just such a trait in his own readership of the situation. It happened like this, he says, simply because he "decline[s] to have it any other way." This is a multiple-reference, in the Faulknerian context. It is exactly this sort of absolutism of thought that has been highlighted in, for instance, *The Hamlet:* for instance, the intractability displayed by the interpretive community of Frenchman's Bend that is so challenged by Flem Snopes. It is the kind of creative monomania practised so damagingly, albeit largely unconsciously, by the characters of *The Sound and the Fury* and, in some ways, *Absalom, Absalom!* It is, of course, profoundly un-Faulknerian, in that if the best of Faulkner's work shows us anything, it is those very "degrees" that Ratliff so blithely dismisses here. Again, this works both as a joke and as a more serious reflection upon fictive creation on Faulkner's part, but also on Ratliff's. For Ratliff himself is self-deprecating and somewhat sardonic here, freely admitting his own wilful creative bigotry by declining to argue his point and telling us this. Ratliff, as well as Faulkner, is pointing to the constructive power of readership and, in effect, of interpretive communities. The implication of this passage as a whole is that the authorial, godlike figure sensed in the "humorous" naming of Quick is in fact those who interpret him, his readers both within Yoknapatawpha and outside it, thereby implicating Ratliff, Faulkner, ourselves, and so on. In fact, just before this passage, Ratliff offers another observation by which to contextualise his apparent assumption of absolutism:

> Naturally they never brought no bystanders with them and after the first two or three minutes there wasn't no witness a-tall left, since he was already laying out cold in the ditch. So my conjecture is jest as good as

> yourn, maybe better since I'm a interested party, being as I got what a feller calls a theorem to prove.[25]

Again, here, Ratliff undercuts his own reading, and its professed "truth," by admitting its conjectural premise. He also, however, points to one of the most important dynamics of the phenomenon of Snopeswatching: that those engaging in it are "interested parties," and this has a crucial effect on the nature of their writerly construction of character and event.

A fundamental difference between this situation and that in, say, *Absalom, Absalom!* is this contemporaneousness of Flem and his readers. True, Thomas Sutpen had plenty of contemporary readers as well, but the narrative framework of that novel is his construction through the creative space afforded by time and its related interpretive ambiguity. While the conclusions arrived at regarding Sutpen and his career are shown to be of painful importance to his readers' regional and self-identity, not least Quentin Compson's, here we are faced with a collection of interpreters who are practically as well as theoretically involved in their subject. This adds another perspective to the situation I have identified in *Absalom, Absalom!,* wherein the distances between reader and subject ultimately collapse. Here, the reader of Faulkner's novels is not involved in such an intrinsic manner as in the earlier work, but we are in a position to witness a literal manifestation of such writerly involvement. If the theoretical systems within *Absalom, Absalom!* enact such a process, then Flem Snopes's various readers within the trilogy act as virtual personifications of it.

This degree of direct, personal involvement in the very story that the narrators tell gives a very particular aspect to their relationship to it. I have argued that *Absalom, Absalom!,* following Wolfgang Iser's idea, enacts the merging of reading, text and life to show that our activities, and those of the readers in the book, are "closely akin to the way in which we gather experience in life."[26] The Snopes trilogy, while to a large extent declining to involve Faulkner's reader at such a fundamental level, extends this exploration to consider a scenario in which this itself is dramatised. The processes by which the readers in the work read and co-construct Flem Snopes are not merely "akin" to their experience in life—they are one and the same. The story that they are fascinated by for so long is not only the story of another man, but to a great extent their own.

Iser discusses the degree to which the reader's personal role in the creation of text involves a certain relinquishing of control over one's own position in order to partake in the process:

> As the literary text involves the reader in the formation of illusion and the simultaneous formation of the means whereby the illusion is

> punctured, reading reflects the process by which we gain experience. Once the reader is entangled, his own preconceptions are continually overtaken, so that the text becomes his "present" while his own ideas fade into the "past"; as soon as this happens he is open to the immediate experience of the text, which was impossible so long as his preconceptions were his "present."[27]

We see this phenomenon developing throughout the trilogy, as various readers become so "entangled" in the affairs of Flem Snopes—or rather in the attempt to understand them—that their individual existences are, to a large extent, compromised. Of course, there is a certain amount of editorial responsibility on Faulkner's part here—for the most part, we only see Ratliff and company when they are involved in Snopeswatching, but this does seem to be their primary motivation, nonetheless. The various members of the porch-chorus, for instance, are only gradually given individual identity for us as they become further and further involved in the Snopes text, down to their names only being divulged long after the group as a whole is shown in operation. Especially in the earlier stages of *The Hamlet,* Ratliff's dependence upon Snopesism for personal identity seems extreme. When illness has forced his absence from Frenchman's Bend for a year, his first questions to Bookwright and Tull are about Flem's activities, as though the man is a page-turner of which no episode can be missed.[28]

But more than simply wanting to know about Flem, Ratliff becomes actively involved in his development. The complicated dealings over the goats, in which Ratliff attempts to outdo Flem in terms of economic cunning through an application of moral rectitude, represent an active engagement in Flem's role in Frenchman's Bend. Ratliff does win a moral victory in some ways here, in that he donates his earnings to Ike—the real loser, having been used by Flem as everybody is—but he wholly fails either to put Flem in his place or, perhaps more importantly, to raise his own game to an appropriate Snopesian level:

> I just never went far enough, he thought. I quit too soon. I went as far as one Snopes will set fire to another Snopeses barn and both Snopeses know it, and that was all right. But I stopped there. I never went on to where that first Snopes will turn around and stomp the fire out so that he can sue that second Snopes for the reward and both Snopeses know that too.[29]

Ratliff recognises, all too late, that his reading of Flem has not been deep enough, or that his capacity for readership is not sufficient to cope with the

extent to which Flem will go. Nonetheless, this is an attempt to apply such reading as he has to its subject, to use it to effect Flem—actively to use interpretation to mould the Snopes text. And indeed, this he does, though not in the manner he had hoped, for Flem's Snopesism is given ever more strength through this episode.

Towards the end of *The Hamlet,* Ratliff displays a rare lack of self-control that stems from his increasing crisis of readership. Having made himself so involved in the continuing saga of Flem Snopes and Frenchman's Bend, and faced with cutting insinuations as to his culpability from Odum Bookwright, Ratliff eventually exclaims, "I never made them Snopeses and I never made the folk that cant wait to bare their backsides to them. I could do more, but I wont. I wont, I tell you!"[30] This is a denial of authorial responsibility, and is somewhat disingenuous in itself—partly because, in such scenes as the goat-transactions, he has to an extent contributed to the growth of Snopesism, at least in mythic terms, and partly because soon after this moment of crisis Ratliff himself will allow himself to become one of those "baring their backsides" to Flem in the Old Frenchman place fiasco. It is as though such abilities as he displayed in episodes like the goats affair are eventually worn away through overuse, and he, Bookwright and the apparently possessed Henry Armstid sacrifice money and concerns they can ill afford unwittingly to enable Flem to pull off the greatest coup of his early career and propel himself towards the richer pastures of Jefferson. Ratliff's readership of Flem both actively contributes to the latter's rise, and has a profound effect on Ratliff himself—following his crisis and ultimate Snopesian defeat in the closing pages of *The Hamlet,* the remaining two volumes of the trilogy see the more interventionist responsibilities of Snopeswatching mostly assumed by the lawyer Gavin Stevens, though this does not indicate a lessening of Ratliff's more theoretical, narrative interest.

Gavin Stevens's assumed narrative detachment from the scenes he describes in *The Town* and *The Mansion* is juxtaposed with his apparently unstoppable impulse to take part in them, from his obsession first with Flem's wife Eula, and then in trying to free her daughter Linda from the restrictive hold of her supposed father's influence, to his eventual culpability, through his failure properly to read Linda's actions, in Flem's murder even as he tries to prevent it. His intervention is the most extreme of any of the direct narrators of the trilogy, and has the greatest effect: as a Snopeswatcher, a reader of Yoknapatawpha, he operates also as one of its most prolific writers, if only through his incessant meddling in the affairs of others. But, as already suggested, his separation of his duties as narrator and as protagonist is often equally extreme, and on occasion virtually absolute.

In his long discussion of Flem's motives, which constitutes Chapter 17 of *The Town,* Stevens assumes a similar position of omniscient authority over his subject as he does over the reader in the scene I discussed earlier, giving the whole account as though with perfect understanding of Flem's mind, and as though from Flem's perspective. These are scenes in which Stevens himself is directly involved, personally and professionally, but as a narrator he completely separates himself from the action. So closely does he presume authorially to follow Flem, that "the bachelor lawyer"[31] is introduced as an external, wholly separate entity. That this is all deflated by Ratliff's dismissal of Gavin's long reading in the very next chapter effectively serves to show how impossible this attempt is: that his participation in events, and the effect that this has, cannot be so separated from their narration as the lawyer would have us believe, and perhaps even believes himself. Warren Beck suggests that

> . . . Faulkner spectator-narrators must be capable of a doubly manly commitment, meeting circumstance and facing issue. It is thereby that they so greatly enlarge and enrich the fiction. Involved in the event both as beholder and evaluator, the narrator becomes more genuinely the *persona,* and in the act of noticing and judging it is himself he tells of too, sometimes himself he celebrates, himself he mourns for.[32]

Allowing for Beck's rather obstructively celebratory tone, this aspect of the narrator's art in the trilogy is fundamental to its effect, to creating the figures both of Flem himself and of his readers and co-creators. It is an effect that Stevens seems only intermittently aware of himself, and the chief importance of Chapter 17 lies in its construction both of an "alternative" Flem and of Stevens himself. Despite his apparent lack of self-knowledge here, Gavin is actually brilliantly realised through narrative device, and we are allowed, or required, to see what this narrator-protagonist cannot and witness his failure to do what he believes he succeeds at: separating his two roles.

But for all this contemporaneous relationship between reader and subject, do we gain any further insight than in the time-distended structures of, say, *Absalom, Absalom!?* What effect does all this have on Flem himself, or rather, perhaps, on our understanding of him? As Flem is very present in these three novels, we might well wonder if he is as party to the constructive powers of readership as Thomas Sutpen or even John Sartoris, who, for all their respective dynamism, have done with the world of the present and no longer have any direct control over their interpretation. As an *active* text—in the terms I suggested in Part Two—is he able to impress us on his own terms,

irrespective of who is telling the story, any more than his precursors? If anything, the situation is shown to be remarkably similar, at least in terms of his narrative presence. Flem remains an enigma whom we can never firmly say we "know," much as we can speculate—and see others speculate—about the inner workings of Sutpen without ever being able to lay claim to his psyche. Flem himself remains tight-lipped throughout his life: for a man so studied, we hear incredibly little from him. The narrators, his own contemporaries, spend so much time trying to work him out because they cannot find a way to do so, and this renders his relation to them analogous to Sutpen's readers with their temporal distance. Paradoxically, this makes him highly subject to the machinations of readership, for the necessary gaps in the narrators' and our knowledge once again require us to invent and create for ourselves. Notwithstanding the important differences between the two men and their respective reception, that the readers of Flem Snopes effectively have as much trouble understanding their subject as the readers of Thomas Sutpen, despite their living with him, once again points to a strong link between gathering experience in life and in reading and co-creating a text: both practices depend upon a co-dependency of readership and writership.

However, there are two Snopeswatchers who have gone largely undiscussed, and they are perhaps the two most important, at least in terms of Flem's practical presence: Mink Snopes and Linda Snopes Kohl. Just as Thomas Sutpen is eventually toppled by his arrogant disregard for the critical feelings of his killer, so Flem falls prey to those figures whose lives, along with Eula's, are most damagingly affected by his actions and attitudes. Like Wash Jones, neither Mink nor Linda have narrative voices of their own, but they similarly have the final say upon whether their subject lives or dies. Their readership of Flem lacks the vocality of a Stevens or a Ratliff, is never given the opportunity to turn interpretation into creation in narrative terms; instead, their life-long, brooding obsession with him creates the monster in more horrific ways than those given voice can imagine. Linda and Mink, in their different ways, create a Flem Snopes that can meet only one end, an end that they work actively to bring into being, despite the efforts of those more vocal but less definite in their readings to prevent it. Ultimately, Flem Snopes dies because the text he quietly but devastatingly writes over so many years is subject to the heartfelt negative interpretations of two very "interested parties." In the single-mindedness of Mink and the quiet determination of Linda, Flem loses the ambiguity afforded by his more "literary" readers, and becomes a text that requires closure, a man who must die in order that they might shake off the roles that he has written for them.

Part Four

Creating Yoknapatawpha

Part Four

Creating Yoknapatawpha

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My previous chapters have explored ways in which the people, situations and history of Yoknapatawpha County are constructed in and by the relationships between various sets of readers and writers. As well as the vital interaction between William Faulkner and the reader, explored in relation to *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary,* we have also seen how individual figures like John Sartoris, Thomas Sutpen and Flem Snopes can be seen to "write" themselves and their environment through their endeavours and attitudes, and how these enterprises themselves relate to the variety of creatively interpretive strategies employed by "readers" within the fiction, within Yoknapatawpha. In so doing, we have seen how readers and writers both of Faulkner's books themselves and within the fictional space that is Yoknapatawpha work together to create the world of the novels, as well as operating in ways that can often be seen as analogous. Before concluding my study with a discussion of how this all fits together—how Yoknapatawpha as a whole is created, and the ramifications this may have for our relation to the fiction and the world as readers—I will consider three further examples of Yoknapatawphan creation that each embody such questions to some degree: the literal reading and writing of books in "The Bear," Joe Christmas as an archetypal Yoknapatawphan figure, and *As I Lay Dying* as a one-novel distillation of the wider patterns of the county's intertextual, heteroglot fabric.

Chapter Nine

But why? But why?: Ike McCaslin, and the Reading and Writing of Books in the Midst of Desolation

Yoknapatawpha is peopled by many figures who may be considered as readers, or whose activities are commensurate with the act of reading, as I hope to be demonstrating. There is one major character, however, who engages in literally the same act as the reader of the book in which he appears: Ike McCaslin, the protagonist of the longest section in *Go Down, Moses,* "The Bear." A complex, dense, and much-discussed story, "The Bear" is rich with meaning and connotation, and to an extent can be seen as encompassing elements both of the author's earlier experimental extremes and the tendency towards statements and gestures that came to mark his later work. Criticism of the story has considered the full breadth of its possibility, and one might almost say that there is little left to say about it, were it not for occasional pieces such as Richard Godden and Noel Polk's "Reading the Ledgers" breathing—or rather *reading*—dramatic new life into it.[1] But there is a clear relevance to my project, and my focus here will be deliberately narrow: I will not try to account for the full significance of the tale. Nor, since it is a piece of Yoknapatawphan reading which *has* received plenty of attention, will I discuss elements of Ike's actual conclusions from the ledgers.[2] Rather, my interest here is to consider the importance of reading itself. This said, Ike's reading of his family's ledgers is an essential component of the story, and surely resonates throughout; my contention in this book is that our acts of reading and, in effect, writing, resonate throughout the series and throughout Yoknapatawpha along with those of its inhabitants. Richard Gray notes the relationship between Ike's literal act of reading, in Part IV of the story, and the wider hunting narrative that surrounds it:

> If the hunting narrative in "The Bear" is full of old tales and talking, then the other story, about Ike's uncovering of the ghosts in the family closet, is similarly packed—in this case, with old signs and signifying. Ike has to learn to read the cryptic clues contained in the family ledger, in order to piece together the family secret. In turn, the reader is forced into a similar activity: moving back and forth in time, collecting the scraps of information and trying to understand them. In effect, the reader shares Ike's experience as inheritor and interpreter: we participate in his curiosity, his occasional feelings of frustration and, not least, in his eventual sense of shock.[3]

By now, this account of Ike's and our actions should seem familiar. In some ways, it sounds rather like our own writerly responsibilities in reading *The Sound and the Fury;* it also has clear overtones of, for instance, the intensive acts of interpretation carried out by Quentin Compson and *Absalom, Absalom!*'s other narrators and readers. Ike's reading, then, is a fictive enactment both of many of the processes I have been identifying as taking place in Faulkner and his readers' creating of Yoknapatawpha, and of the importance of these and comparable acts in the creation of the county by those who live in it, within the fiction.

Ike studies a set of books and as a consequence makes fundamental decisions regarding his own life and family history, which in turn arguably have ramifications for the history and interpretation of the county. We also witness his lengthy discussion of the content and import of those texts with his cousin, Cass Edmonds, and his encounter with Fonsiba's redundantly reading husband. As such, Part IV of "The Bear" is a literal act of Yoknapatawphan writerly reading, going even beyond the analogous models I have been suggesting, while emphasising how useful those models can be in reading Faulkner. It also begs searching questions of the usefulness or otherwise of reading—literally, in this case, the reading of books—in a troubled world. In trying to come to terms with our own constitutive role in Yoknapatawpha, and considering the value of Yoknapatawphan creation in the wider world, "The Bear" is a crucial text.

Ike's repudiation of the McCaslin plantation as a result of the narrative he discerns in the ledgers has shades of Bayard Sartoris's rejection of some of the codes his father embodies, when he refuses to avenge the Colonel's murder in like fashion. Ike's poring over the ledgers in the plantation commissary reminds one of Bayard's reading his father's pipe and the names in the family bible. If Bayard ultimately rejects the Sartoris "text" in all its assertion of absolute right, as discussed in Part Three, then so would Ike seem to reject

the history enshrined in this literal McCaslin text. But I would suggest that things are rather more complex and ambiguous in the McCaslin case than the Sartoris, on all levels: the writing of the text and the circumstances of that writing; the events that are written and read; and the reading of the text and the circumstances of that reading. In contrast to the bold claims of Sartoris, McCaslin identity is a fragile thing, and difficult to pin down in any firm sense. The ledgers themselves have multiple authors. Much reference is made to the physicality of the ledgers—the actual books—with their "scarred cracked leather bindings" and "yellowed pages scrawled in fading ink by the hand first of his grandfather and then of his father and uncle."[4] But this physicality, in its antiquity and decrepitude, emphasises their elusiveness. Ike considers

> the twins who were identical even in their handwriting, unless you had specimens side by side to compare, and even when both hands appeared on the same page (as often happened, as if, long since past any oral intercourse, they had used the diurnally advancing pages to conduct the unavoidable business of the compulsion which had traversed all the waste wilderness of North Mississippi in 1830 and '40 and singled them out to drive) they both looked as though they had been written by the same perfectly normal ten-year-old boy, even to the spelling, except that the spelling did not improve . . . [5]

The identity of the ledgers' individual writers is often unclear from their handwriting, which merges voices to make one apparent voice even as the entries themselves enact conversations which may well not occur outside the yellowing pages. As so often in Faulkner, we have a narrative voice consisting of plural constituent voices, here striking through the apparent singularity of literally written script. A ledger, of course, is intended to make permanent record of transactions and other relevant occurrences, to inscribe these occurrences in perpetuity. These ledgers, on the other hand, seem actually to take the form of Buck and Buddy's linguistic transactions, rendering them not record but the verbal events themselves. As such, rather than permanently inscribing these exchanges in history, the ledgers' conversations take place alongside or even instead of that history: the writing makes them paradoxically *less* certain than they may otherwise have been.

Whether the conversations between Buck and Buddy were also conducted elsewhere or not, parts of the ledgers do literally consist of their dialogue, each utterance made, following Bakhtin's understanding, in active anticipation of reception and response. In a bracketed passage, we see the

twins' hands discussing freeing one of their slaves, Percival Brownlee, a fellow bought by Buck from Bedford Forrest but deemed inept in every role they try him in:

> the second:
> *Jun 13th 1856 How $1 per yr 265$ 265 yrs Wholl sign his Free paper*
>
> then the first again:
> *1 Oct 1856 Mule josephine Broke Leg @ shot wrong stall wrong niger wrong everything $100. dolars*
>
> and the same:
> *2 Oct 1856 Freed Debit McCaslin @ McCaslin $265. dolars*
>
> then the second again:
> *Oct 3th Debit Theophilus McCaslin Niger 265 $ Mule 100 $ 365 $ He hasn't gone yet Father should be here*
>
> then the first:
> *3 Oct 1856 Son of a bitch wont leave What would father done*
>
> the second:
> *29th of Oct 1856 Renamed him*
>
> the first:
> *31 Oct 1856 Renamed him what*
>
> the second:
> *Chrstms 1856 Spintrius* [6]

Notwithstanding the authorial voice's noting of its brevity, one might immediately observe that this is an extremely drawn-out dialogue, taking the best part of a year, sometimes with weeks or months between utterances. As Godden and Polk point out, "the increasing lapse of time between these entries raises serious questions about the twins' relationship."[7] For this and other reasons, it seems near useless as a piece of bookkeeping—ironic, given that Brownlee himself was purchased as a "*Bookepper*"[8]—but is all the more revealing a document for this. Though this textual record of 1856 is spare, to say the least, each scrawled word is shot through with multiple meaning, each delay an example of Macherey's "area of shadow" in which the

McCaslin world lives and breathes.[9] Indeed, the written bare bones of the ledger itself are perhaps akin to those of the first section of *The Sound and the Fury,* only gaining significance and meaning with great effort on the readers' part; here, however, we also have Ike performing the same task as ourselves, reading the text within the text.

This passage from the ledger reveals the slave system's inhumanity even as it suggests that Buck and Buddy's own involvement in it is troubled. The dehumanisation of slaves is abundantly clear in Brownlee's reduction to a piece of property valued at $265, in comparison to the $100 mule evidently named "*josephine*" with the same paternalistic power with which old Carothers might have renamed the slave. We might note the bleak irony of the freed Brownlee's being referred to as "*son of a bitch,*" a standard insult, but one whose dependence upon matters of parenthood is as awkward in these circumstances as it is when applied to Joe Christmas in *Light in August,* discussed in the following chapter. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that Carothers would have freed him in the first place, as the story goes on to reveal his own treatment of his slaves. Indeed, Buck and Buddy are subverting the dominant codes of their father even as they seek recourse to them: Carothers, now dead, is not here to rename anyone, and what we have is the twins' own construction of him as they act in ways contrary to his. We should not overstate the case, of course: Buck and Buddy are still slaveholders, notwithstanding the manumission they gradually bring about on the plantation. But within the moral restrictions of this vile system, and even though they exercise the assumed power of bondage and freedom over their slaves, they display touches of relative enlightenment. The "*niger*" in question performs none of his allotted tasks to the twins' satisfaction, but rather than mete out horrific punishment they instead free him. Furthermore, Buck eventually accepts financial responsibility for the folly of buying Brownlee in the first place, as well as for the mule that dies as a result. Repulsive though the claiming of another man's humanity remains, Buck follows through when that claim proves financially unwise by punishing himself rather than the man he has dehumanised (although, of course, this effectively dehumanises him yet further, as Buck claims even his personal uselessness for himself). This is, at least, a version of the story one might discern from the grimly comic portrait allowed by the ledger entries; Godden and Polk, for example, discern a far more involved and serious one.[10] To my mind, rather than the litany of horrors we might expect, the twins' ledger dialogue reads rather as strangely knockabout satire, the awkward and even potentially affectionate humour we might feel with regard to the McCaslin brothers and their apparent relative magnanimity providing a

form of relief from the overall seriousness of Ike's ledger-reading. Such humour and affection is also tempered by the possibility that the slim scraps of evidence in the books might leave rather more unsaid than yet hinted at: just because specific cruelty is absent from this written record does not mean that it did not take place. Broadly comic though this passage may be, it is also a suggestive snapshot of a system about which, to appropriate Macherey, the text says what it does not say.

The authorial voice itself, following Ike's perspective (though not speaking directly in his words), notes that the ledger entries allow the McCaslin slaves to take "substance and even a sort of shadowy life with their passions and complexities too."[11] As with so many elements in Faulkner's work, it is not the ledgers themselves which grant the slaves this "life" (quite the opposite, we might reasonably argue) but Ike's and our engagement with them. We learn from the ledgers of Brownlee's utter failure as a bookkeeper, ploughman, and stock-handler, but this is Buck and Buddy's assessment. One gets the sense of a rather more devious and quick-witted fellow than they allow: he is, after all, freed, and the strong possibility exists that he gained this for himself by playing to the twins' foibles. It takes imagination on the part of the reader for the slaves' "substance" to take form, and we have just such an imaginative reader in front of us, too—Ike McCaslin. But Ike is not the first in his family to read, question and subvert its codes. I would suggest that we also have two other creative readers in this tale, and perhaps more surprising ones: Amodeus and Theophilus McCaslin, Uncles Buck and Buddy themselves.

Echoes of the dismantling of the Sartoris myth by his descendants are evident here, too. The McCaslin story includes yet another of Faulkner's great houses, "the tremendously-conceived, the almost barnlike edifice which [Carothers] had not even completed."[12] Physically, this "edifice" seems akin to the artists' impression of a plantation mansion that is Sutpen's Hundred, a façade intended to impress upon all the grandeur of its master. But McCaslin is more established in Yoknapatawpha than Sutpen: this is a domain clearly and unashamedly founded upon the local exploitation of slaves, and for all its lack of finish it is more model than copy in the context. More interesting is what happens to it upon Carothers' death. The twins rehouse the family slaves in the unfinished mansion, while they move into a small cabin which they build themselves, "refusing to allow any slave to touch any timber of it other than the actual raising into place the logs which two men alone could not handle."[13] The big house itself now becomes a scene of almost slapstick ceremony: Buck and Buddy, rather than complete their father's work, have made a comic fiction of both it and him. Each night, they marshal the slaves

ritually into the house, "the tremendous abortive edifice scarcely yet out of embryo, as if even old Carothers McCaslin had paused aghast at the concrete indication of his own vanity's boundless conceiving."[14] Again the brothers act in their father's stead: *they* pause aghast and turn his vain conceit on its head, summoning up the image of a confounded patriarch and rendering his palace a mass slave quarters. Indeed, it is unfit even for that tawdry purpose, as everyone concerned knows that the slaves will be out of the doorless back entrance as soon as the front door is locked, and back before it is unlocked again in the morning. The twins not only turn the mansion into its antithesis, but render the whole system it is supposed to epitomise a pointless farce, with the complicity of the slaves themselves.[15] We might also detect elements of Flem Snopes's transforming of the de Spain mansion through his imposition of his own purpose and worldview, as discussed in Part Two. This image of the McCaslin mansion has power precisely because of what it usurps, which in itself has barely struggled beyond the level of conception. In their own somewhat disorganised way (much less calculated and systematic than Flem's actions), the twins effect another change akin to Barthes' model of metalinguistic transformation. Again, in the tradition of the Southwestern humorists' tall tales, the comedy is grim at the same time as it is broad. And while the twins may deliberately refuse to live in a slave-built house, they still depend on the slaves to help when they prove physically inadequate: even their attempt to snub slavery relies, in small part, upon the exploitation of slaves.

If Flem overtakes an apparently complete and established emblem of the old order and turns a monument into a footprint, the twins do something similar but with some differences in nuance. Flem, though a Yoknapatawphan by birth and heritage, is a class outsider motivated by profit, and apparently without thought for what he is usurping, proceeds to change the face of the county. The McCaslin twins, on the other hand, do not infiltrate and take over, but rather dismantle from within—what is more, they do so with great disquiet, notwithstanding their broadly comic portrayal.[16] In the class terms of the day, they come into possession of the house and slaves in the accepted fashion, through inheritance, and their treatment of their property surely does not represent any changing of order, as such. As members of a Yoknapatawphan dynasty, their resignification of their nascent ancestral home does not so much replace one narrative with another, but rather change the nature and tone of the one already one being written. They keep the book's covers, the "edifice," but reconceive its contents, and a grand narrative of Southern aristocratic magnificence, in the style of Sartoris, is turned into a grim, slapstick satire of just such narratives. Buck and Buddy do not so much turn a monument into a footprint as traipse their own insubordinate footprints all over it.

But, again, Buck and Buddy, and for that matter Ike, are not so opposed to the established Southern order as this may make them seem. Buck does, after all, go off to fight for the Confederacy, and even Ike evokes the Lost Cause in his debate with Cass. Ike's imaginative powers are needed in full to discern "not only the general and condoned injustice and its slow amortization but the specific tragedy which had not been condoned and could never be amortized."[17] For while the ledgers do provide a fascinating insight into the operation of one of Yoknapatawpha's great antebellum plantations, it is not the overall fact of his family's slaveowning history that leads Ike to give up his inheritance. Rather, he is intrigued as to what specifically provoked his father and uncle to free the many slaves they inherited from old Carothers, as well as their "own" (Brownlee), and to take their peculiar attitude to the big house. It is not so much the general horror of slavery that appals Ike and Buck and Buddy, but rather a particular strain of horror in McCaslin slavery. Even beyond the historical/fictional portrait they present, the ledgers not only provide the means by which Ike interprets this strain, but also allow both him and us to view the earlier readings of it by Buck and Buddy.

Ike's attitudes to the ledgers, and his motivations for reading them, change as he grows up. As a young boy, the ledgers are "familiar" and he has "no particular desire to open them":

> and though he intended to examine them some day because he realized that they probably contained a chronological and much more comprehensive though doubtless tedious record than he would ever get from any other source, not alone of his own flesh and blood but of all his people, not only the whites but the black ones too, who were as much a part of his ancestry as his white progenitors, and of the land which they had all held and used in common . . . without regard to colour or titular ownership, it would only be on some idle day when he was old and perhaps even bored a little since what the old books contained would be after all these years fixed immutably, finished, unalterable, harmless. Then he was sixteen. He knew what he was going to find before he found it.[18]

Ike's youthful assumptions about the ledgers are, of course, somewhat erroneous, in line with his swallowing the pastoral fallacy of Southern biracial harmony on the land. As long as he is willing to let the ledgers be a mute part of such paternalistic fictions, they do indeed remain unalterable and harmless, as they exist only in terms of the authoritative antiquity their "scarred

and cracked" covers lend them and the socially accepted version of history he imagines them to contain. While Ike has this approach, the ledgers serve, like his grandfather's mansion, as edifices projecting one set of "truths" that conceal more sinister, unread realities within. Don't challenge your history, and it will indeed be "fixed immutably." While it is hardly his fault, as a child, Ike's deliberate lack of readership in itself projects and preserves a false Yoknapatawphan past. Only when the ledgers become malleable, interpretable—that is, only when their reader gains the maturity to interpret and give them meaning—do they become harmful, dangerous, important. Ike needs to learn to say, to think, "*But why? But why?*"[19]

This intense questioning comes when Uncle Buddy replies to Ike's father's assertion that the slave Eunice had "*Drownd in Crick Cristmas Day 1832*"[20] with the correction:

> *June 21th 1833 Drownd herself*
>
> and the first:
> *23 Jun 1833 Who in hell ever heard of a niger drownding him self*
>
> and the second, unhurried, with a complete finality; the two identical entries might have been made with a rubber stamp save for the date:
> *Aug 13th 1833 Drownd herself*[21]

Even though, when he is sixteen, Ike "knows" what he will find, this knowledge is different to his younger certainty of ignorance. As a young man now more alert to the complexities and ambiguities of life in general, and his familial and regional history in particular, he comes to the ledgers in anticipation of the shocks that will come, even if he does not know exactly what form they will take. Ike's primary interest as ledger-reader is with Buck and Buddy rather than poor Eunice herself: he "thought not Why drowned herself, but thinking what he believed his father had thought when he found his brother's first comment: Why did Uncle Buddy think she had drowned herself?"[22] Buck and Buddy themselves are ledger-readers, insofar as each of them read the other as they write; Ike, many years later, reads their dialogue and (re)creates their collective and individual responses to the McCaslin family secrets. Ike comes to his realisation of Carothers' acts of miscegenation and incest, and his attempts to disguise them, through his painstaking unpicking of Buck and Buddy's exchanges, as well as his own increasing understanding of the way things really went between plantation "fathers" and their slaves. There is some degree of uncertainty, notwithstanding the

probable correctness of Ike's reading, purely because of the narrative layers in the story's construction and the fragility of some of those layers. Indeed, there are strong overtones of Quentin and Shreve's ultimate communing with the Henry and Bon they have created in *Absalom, Absalom!,* as Ike "seemed to see [Eunice] actually walking into the icy creek on that Christmas day six months before her daughter's and her lover's (*Her first lover's* he thought. *Her first*) child was born."[23] Indeed, Bon's challenge to Henry in that most dialogically charged of Faulknerian scenes as to whether it is the miscegenation or the incest that really bothers him also carries some weight here in regard to Ike. Insofar as the *Absalom* scene is crucially informed by Shreve and especially Quentin's own identity themes, to use Norman Holland's model, so the version of McCaslin affairs in 1832–3 necessarily reflects what Ike "knows" he will find—which is not to insist that it is any less accurate for that.[24] What is important here is the introduction of horror, or rather its reintroduction. The ledgers contain nothing but bare facts, and is somewhat thin on those, but when Ike reads the previous generation's words he comes to understand the impetus for their own form of repudiation of Carothers' legacy, Buck and Buddy's repulsion at their own father's actions and attitudes. Again, notwithstanding its likelihood, Ike does of course "write" even this response himself from the scant materials at hand, just as his own ultimate response is the product of his understanding of his forebears' and his own comprehension of the philosophical concerns at hand. The sense of horror that exists in the story comes from Ike's creative interpretation of Carothers' actions and his attempts to fictionalise them away, of the ramifications these go on to have through succeeding black generations, of his father and uncle's responses, and of Ike's own feelings as the next inheritor of the family's dubious treasures. The ledgers need his "*But why?*" to turn from harmless artefacts of fictional Yoknapatawphan history into Yoknapatawphan fiction that recreates and unveils the harm of its history.[25]

Ike's poring over the ledgers in the commissary is an iconic Faulknerian image, one which, like old Bayard's musings in the attic, the discussions in Rosa Coldfield's office and Quentin and Shreve's creations in the room at Harvard, marks this site as one of what Wesley Morris and Barbara Alverson Morris call Faulkner's "places of remembering."[26] This it is, but as I have been suggesting, such places are sites of remembering of the most active, constructive, and sometimes destructive kind. Indeed, this is the case to such an extent that one might be tempted to appropriate Toni Morrison's notion and rather call them "places of rememory."[27] The commissary and these other places do not merely house the static, patient perusal of the past, but rather host its active recreation within the text (itself the site of yet further

active recreation). Through such engagement, the past is brought into being in the present in ever more dynamic ways. Furthermore, the initial reading in itself—in this instance Ike's literal reading of the ledgers—is hardly the entire process, as Faulkner continually gives us processes of rereading and discussion. Indeed, following his actual reading, Ike "would never need look at the ledgers again nor did he; the yellowed pages in their fading and implacable succession were as much a part of his consciousness, and would remain so for ever, as the fact of his own nativity."[28] Nonetheless, in many ways, this is only the beginning of his more detailed, more active reading, as the rest of his life will be deeply affected by his ongoing relation to his interpretations of the ledgers. In "The Bear," Ike's own reading is actually framed in the context of lengthy discussions with his cousin Cass Edmonds *about* the ledgers and their reading. This is comparable to the perpetual, communal reading and rereading of Sutpen, and the discourse of the porch chorus in *The Hamlet,* for instance, as well as the endless dialogic formation of *Light in August*'s Joe Christmas (discussed in the following chapter). Here, if Ike does what we do in reading the book(s), then he and Cass collectively do what we might in talking about our readings, or indeed in the respective writing and reading of a book about them, such as this one: literary criticism.

Cass and Ike's discussions are not just about the ledgers themselves, of course, but about Ike's decision to forego his title to the McCaslin plantation, a decision he has come to in large part because of his perusal of the family books, but also under the influence of his part-Indian mentor Sam Fathers, whose views on the illegitimacy of land ownership are at odds with mainstream society's. Both Ike and Cass also use biblical texts to try to prove their own arguments and disprove the other's, leaving the authority of "His Book" somewhat fragile, to say the least. Ike pointedly says that "there are some things He said in the Book, and some things reported of Him that He did not say." When Cass asks Ike if he is suggesting that "these men who transcribed His Book for Him were sometime liars," Ike replies in the positive:

> Yes. Because they were human men. They were trying to write down the heart's truth out of the heart's driving complexity, for all the complex and troubled hearts which would beat after them. What they were trying to tell, what He wanted said, was too simple. Those for whom they transcribed His words could not have believed them. It had to be expounded in the everyday terms which they were familiar with and could comprehend, not only those who listened but those who told it too, because if they who were that near to Him as to have been elected from among all who breathed and spoke language to transcribe and

> relay His words, could comprehend truth only through the complexity of passion and lust and hate and fear which drives the heart, what distance back to truth must they traverse whom truth could only reach by word of mouth? [29]

Aside from the theological angles to Cass and Ike's debate, this stands as another of Faulkner's textual musings on textual creation. That Ike and Cass have different views arises not just from differing interpretations of the text, but differences over the what the text itself is. Cass has been using "the Book" to present an historical argument for why Ike must not forego the McCaslin land. Ike is effectively suggesting that this or any book is an unreliable means of getting at history.[30] There are resonances of Plato's dismissal of poetry from the republic here, each layer of representation and interpretation removing one further and further from God's essential truth, and Ike's anguish throughout contains a subtext that questions the validity of textual enterprise. This is a fervent adherence to "the heart's truth" that rejects even that text which purports to tell it, on the basis of its being text: text cannot be truth. The transcription of simple truth involves the involvement of human complexity at the stage of the writing and the reading, and the "everyday"—usually a term used to denote simplicity, the basic, the mundane—here denotes the human tendency to move away from the simplicity of "truth." To put this in the Bakhtinian terms I apply elsewhere in this study, it is the very inevitability of dialogue—and as Ike notes, the *anticipation* of the inevitability of dialogue—at every stage of utterance, transcription, reception, and interpretation which renders text a totally unreliable means of understanding truth. Dialogue complicates infinitely, and the heteroglot possibility of its every component is wholly at odds with the simplicity of that truth which only "the heart" knows. As imperfect manifestations of imperfect human understanding, texts are not to be trusted.

As someone who has struggled with the elusions and allusions of the McCaslin family ledgers, in all their dubious dialogic glory, Ike is as well placed as anyone to speak for the unreliability of texts. But we might also note a degree of hypocrisy is his position, in that he himself is motivated, in part at least, by his reading of these texts. It is his very acts of interpretation, be they accurate or otherwise with regard to the "truth" of the matters at hand, that have led him to his discussion with Cass in the commissary. Indeed, it is the ledgers' refusal to proffer anything like a simple, knowable truth that leads him to his conclusions. But this, paradoxically, is not really as opposed to his argument about the Bible as it might seem. Remember that Ike "knew what he was going to find before he found it" in the ledgers.[31] The

heart's truth, perhaps? Certainly, as discussed earlier, his ledger-reading at the age of sixteen represents a rejection of sorts of society's fiction about the farm, the South, human conduct, in favour of a willingness to test out his own interpretive skills. But this in itself is not to say that he comes to the texts with an open mind. As Godden and Polk very persuasively discuss, Ike reads with an agenda, and will "countenance none of the variables."[32] Whether or not one ultimately follows Godden and Polk's assertion that Ike's stated reading of Carothers' sins is actually a cover for his far more repressed and shocked realisation of the acts of his father and uncle, the point that Ike himself is an unreliable and personally motivated reader is hard to refute. They point out, in discussion of the ledger pages seeming to "turn of their own accord,"[33] that

> . . . at the very moment Isaac constructs L.Q.C. [old Carothers] as the villain, he attributes agency to the documentation. The ledger pages thus, for Isaac, constitute a coherent—and thereby true—history, but we recall that when commentators say "History tells us," what they mean, but rarely say, is that they tell history.[34]

What Ike puts forth as "the heart's truth" is surely no more authoritative than his wilfully creative reading of the ledgers. In a sense, it is of little matter whether Ike is right or wrong about what happened in his family past, or for that matter in the past of man and God; the deciding factor is his conviction that he is absolutely right about the wrongs, having decided on a reading in the face of numerous other possible ones. One might also posit him as one who assumes the extreme power of the reader in such wholly reader-oriented theories as those of Stanley Fish and Norman Holland, wherein the text becomes utterly captive to the interpreter's defining will even, in this case, as it is disingenuously granted editorial power of its own. The fact that Ike relies on a "truth" that he claims to be objective, outside himself, renders the situation rather sinister, notwithstanding the sympathy we may have with some of Ike's views. Seen this way, Ike begins to look like one of Faulkner's dangerous religious zealots, like Doc Hines in *Light in August* (see the following chapter), who impose their own decisive will in the name of the God whose will they claim to be following (though I am not suggesting that Ike is as dangerous as such zealots, either in Yoknapatawpha or our own world). Furthermore, this effectively means that Ike proves his own point about texts being unsound because they are the product of humanity's discursive needs, though hardly to his intended end as it invalidates his own authority at the same time. To this reader, too, there are uncomfortable parallels with

Faulkner's own increasing recourse to the "eternal truths and verities" of his later Nobel Prize speech.[35]

Notwithstanding the essential hypocrisy, or at least self-contradiction, of Ike's view of textual creation when taken as a whole, the whole question of its value in such a world as ours is asked in other ways in Part IV of "The Bear." We have already pondered the extent to which Buck and Buddy's textual dialogue perhaps takes the place of "oral intercourse" between them, written language proving an unsatisfactory substitute for personal exchange, if only in terms of clarity (or Ike's "simplicity"). Ike himself is on the receiving end of another replacement of deed with text in the form of his Uncle Hubert's bequest, "the burlap lump which fifteen years ago had changed its shape completely overnight" completing its transformation from a silver cup full of gold pieces into a sheaf of I.O.U.s and a few coppers.[36] Hubert had clearly begun borrowing from his initial gift almost as soon as he made it and continued doing so until there was no gift left, only a set of written, never-honoured promises to reinstate it. The I.O.U.s themselves are all signed, and written on everything from "good linen bond" to "the paper label from a new pair of overalls," the very writing materials testament to Hubert's declining fortunes, even aside from what is written. Ironically perhaps, these sorry documents are actually the most simply and eternally truthful texts in the whole story: "*Isaac . . . I.O.U.*" say the notes, and Hubert indeed does and always will. However, they are also a manifestation of textual representations being a good deal less than the objects they represent, still less yet than the conceptual wealth that was the first stage in the process. One might point out, of course, that pieces of gold are mere tokens of wealth in themselves; but even so, this would still be a case of them being replaced with tokens of deferment rather than an actual deed. All this comes to a gloriously semiotic head with the last note which, giving up on even the admission of debt and professed intent to reimburse, merely reads: "*One silver cup. Hubert Beauchamp.*"[37] Instead of the cup—and indeed the man—there are words feebly intended to signify them. To appropriate the terminology of Barthes' appropriation of Saussure, the signified has been literally removed from the situation, and we are left with an empty sign which itself then becomes the signifier of the corrupted second-order of representation: this goes for both components of the notes—the silver cup *and* Hubert Beauchamp. The original meaning and intention of both bequest and bequeather are deformed by later events and actions into something which evicts that meaning but still takes it into its new form, in a sense like Flem's deforming of the de Spain mansion, or indeed Buck and Buddy's of their father's. Again, though, this is a literally textual example, in the context of a story so troubled by the ramifications

of reading and writing, that could have fitted into Barthes' own collection of mythologies.[38]

There is yet another reader of books in this section of "The Bear," the black "carpet-bagger" who arrives to marry Fonsiba and take her off to a life of freedom away from the McCaslin farm. When Ike seeks out Fonsiba five months later to give her the money the ledgers suggest she is owed as one of Ike's black relatives, he finds the two of them on "a farm only in embryo, perhaps a good farm, maybe even a plantation some day, but not now, not for years yet and only then with labour, hard and enduring and unflagging work and sacrifice."[39] The reflection that this potentially could be a plantation perhaps brings to mind Sutpen's taming of the wilderness, or even Sartoris's own hard work, but Fonsiba's husband is portrayed as being more in thrall to the concept of managing the land as a free black man in the South than actually doing it. Ike sees:

> the man himself, reading—sitting there in the only chair in the house, before that miserable fire for which there was not wood sufficient to last twenty-four hours, in the same ministerial clothing in which he had entered the commissary five months ago and a pair of gold-framed spectacles which, when he looked up and then rose to his feet, the boy saw did not even contain lenses, reading a book in the midst of all that desolation . . . [40]

So Ike finds Fonsiba's husband reading instead of working as the farm falls apart around them, while the wife he has taken away from the scene of her ancestral slavery starves and shivers in freedom. We do not discover what the book is that the man reads, though his "ministerial clothing" cannot help but suggest. Ike's contempt for the man is palpable, and we should be careful not to elide his viewpoint too closely with Faulkner's, not withstanding his subsequent words' similarity to Faulkner's own controversial cautionary statements that African Americans needed to come into their rightful freedom and prosperity at a manageable speed.[41] But the point I would attend to here is the problem of reading when there is clearly more practical work to be done. On a fundamental level, without fuel for the fire and food for the pot, they will die, and without the land being worked, the nascent farm will fail—it does not matter how good the intentions are or profound the thought behind them. The specific context is, of course, the wreck of the postbellum South—"cursed," as Ike would have it[42]—but the story's own writing in a time of global catastrophe must surely cause us to recognise yet another act of Faulknerian self-reflection here.[43] What good is reading while the South falls further into ruin, or humanity tears itself apart? The apparent

emptiness of the exercise is emphasised by this reader's lensless spectacles. If these are to aid vision, they clearly fail, and instead imply an unfocused understanding; if they lend the air of the scholar, then this show is deflated by Ike's realisation of their superfluity, as well as the lack of an expected audience. This man's reading is portrayed, through Ike's perception at least, as merely going through the motions at best, and at worst a futile intellectual distraction, poorly executed even on its own shoddy terms, in a world that needs practical endeavour.

Once more, we must be careful about identifying Ike with Faulkner here, particularly as this standpoint reveals yet further contradictions in Ike's position: he is himself a studious reader of books, and, as Godden and Polk illustrate, one with somewhat limited focus. Morris and Morris also point out that he actively contributes to the physical *writing* of the ledgers, though they suggest that "the inscription of payment in the balance sheets of the ledgers is an illusion of closure, a purely aesthetic conclusion no less blindly escapist than Ike's dramatic gesture of refusing his inheritance."[44] And indeed, like Fonsiba's husband, he also withdraws from active participation in the world, even as he takes up an ostensibly more "practical" vocation in carpentry. At the University of Virginia sessions, Faulkner discusses Ike's response to what he finds, to the South he inherits: "He says, This is bad and I will withdraw from it. What we need are people who will say, This is bad and I'm going to do something about it, I'm going to change it."[45] To which one overall response to the troubled accounts of troubled acts of textual creation in section four of "The Bear" might be to ponder what we are all doing reading and writing books in the midst of all this desolation.

Dirk Kuyk suggest that as we "recognise that Cass and Ike are debating the meaning not merely of their acts but of ours,"[46] we might also note that they end up working together, after a fashion: "Now Cass and Ike no longer seem to oppose each other. While they are not in accord and never will be, they are now cooperating in working out the implications of their history and their beliefs."[47] This perhaps wraps things up a little too easily, but it is a reminder of Fish's notion of "interpretive communities," wherein readers of greatly differing opinions work together to at least agree on the terms of the argument, the essential parameters of the text at hand, to avert the descent into interpretive chaos. Which is all very well, but, again, "The Bear" seems to suggest that even this is the textual equivalent of collectively and discordantly fiddling while Rome burns. Are we not, ironically, following Ike into worldly irrelevance as we go about creating Yoknapatawpha? Karl F. Zender notes that "as his career advanced, Faulkner became increasingly convinced that the very quality of the modern world poses a threat to our continued

knowledge of it. From failures of the reader, his attention shifted to failures of the text."[48] There is the very real possibility that regardless of the quality of its interpreters, the world may be too far gone to be in any way redeemed through our attentions. And regardless of how good as readers and writers we may be in the terms of any of the theories I have been applying and many others too, if the text itself is poor, or corrupt, or ruined, we cannot realistically hope for success in its positive realisation. Put another way, the "virtual dimension" that Wolfgang Iser posits as the product of the interaction of text and reader, cannot come into being if one or other party is lacking.[49] If we follow this line of reasoning to its logical end, we should give up on our writerly-readerly activities altogether.

The implied and explicit considerations of the usefulness of, among other literary projects, creating Yoknapatawpha to be found in "The Bear" are among the most anguished reflections in Faulkner's work, as they address not only the horrors of history and the present, but also our assumed means of understanding and dealing with them. But we might also reflect that as well as examining such concerns in microcosm (the reading of the ledgers and other texts) and macrocosm (the attempts to understand the South and its history, and by implication the world and humanity), "The Bear" is itself is a text to be read. I would argue that it is a highly effective one, in part because it asks these very searching questions. Whether even the asking of such questions is as futile and self-serving as the story often worries might be the case remains, ultimately, an open question in itself: again, I would argue not, for reasons that I hope come through over the course of this book. To my mind, Yoknapatawpha's creation through reading and writing is itself further enriched by this literal consideration of such processes, further emphasising its constructive relation to the world in which we find ourselves reading and writing it.

Chapter Ten

Liable to Be Anything: Joe Christmas, Yoknapatawphan

In placing my discussion of Joe Christmas in this concluding section of my study, rather than with my earlier considerations of writer and reader figures, I wish to claim a somewhat emblematic status for him. It seems to me that the dense and complex nature of his construction, and the construction of the novel of which he is so vital a part, represents a coming together in one character of many of the tendencies and processes I have identified thus far. As such, I hope to demonstrate how he can be used to focus the many strands of interpretive creation explored and manifested in the series as a whole, and to examine him as an individual personification of the county-wide construction to be considered in my final chapter. Joe Christmas, I suggest, is in many ways Yoknapatawpha's archetypal character, and this is largely because his engagement with so many regional and theoretical archetypes undermines the authority of any one of them while displaying to dramatic and tortured effect their cumulative effect as a multiform, created *life.*

In claiming such a status for Christmas, I do not propose that he is in every way analogous to all the construction of the characters we have seen so far, or indeed that every facet of the various theories of reading and writing I have applied and discussed can automatically be used in relation to him. However, such is the complexity of his presence in *Light in August* and Yoknapatawpha that he suggests himself strongly as a means of considering the personal manifestations of this sprawling network of readings and writings as a theoretical mass. Indeed, for one of the most *apparent* characters in Faulkner's work, in terms of the strength and immediacy of his actions and their results, he is phenomenally hard to pin down; this, indeed, is at the root of many of his problems and the problems of those who try to define him. To an extreme extent, Christmas allows, or forces, us to see creative activity

on every level of the fictive process: Faulkner and his reader, Joe himself and the numerous interpreters he has in the novel, and, crucially, in the encounters and tensions between them. As such, he is a particularly pertinent means of comprehending the analogous nature of the writing and reading to be found within Yoknapatawpha with that of the series of novels in which the county is sited. In attempting to understand Joe Christmas, therefore, we must abandon any hope of discovering any singular or defining answers, and engage with him on the dialogic terms he demands. Accordingly, I will begin by returning to Mikhail Bakhtin, and in particular some of the ideas collected in *The Dialogic Imagination.*

Bakhtin is particularly helpful when thinking about Joe Christmas because of his emphasis on the *social* nature of language, a factor that lies at the heart of his ruminations on language's—or languages'—constructive powers. Even before engaging with details of Bakhtin's theories, this is easily applicable to the experience of Faulkner's character, a man whose every breath seems couched in socio-linguistic terms. Indeed, *Light in August* can be seen as one of the more overt of Faulkner's attempts to apply his more experimental literary techniques and considerations to the very pressing social conditions of his region and time. With this novel, Faulkner presents his most sustained and concerted meditation upon the construction of identity—racial, sexual and religious—through the machinations of language and its social applications, and it becomes painfully apparent that the essence of Joe Christmas is language itself. As such, Bakhtin's discussion of the social, polyphonic nature of novelistic language is especially useful in relation to *Light in August*'s construction of its central character.

On the night before he kills Joanna Burden, Christmas lights a cigarette in his cabin, and flings the match into the darkness:

> Then he was listening for the light, trivial sound which the dead match would make when it struck the floor; and then it seemed to him that he heard it. Then it seemed to him, sitting on the cot in the dark room, that he was hearing a myriad sounds of no greater volume—voices, murmurs, whispers: of trees, darkness, earth; people: his own voice; other voices evocative of names and times and places—which he had been conscious of all his life without knowing it, which were his life, thinking *God perhaps and me not knowing that too* He could see it like a printed sentence, fullborn and already dead *God loves me too* like the faded and weathered letters on a last year's billboard *God loves me too*[1]

In the apparently trivial act of throwing a match to the floor, Joe experiences a kind of linguistic epiphany. He is keenly aware of the "myriad" elements that constitute his life and history, and furthermore becomes aware at this point of his own previously unnoted consciousness of them. On a second or subsequent reading, this seems eerily suggestive of the effect the "serene," "triumphant" death-image of Christmas will have on its witnesses a little over a week later.[2] Joe's reflections here encompass virtually all the participants in his make-up, whether explicitly or otherwise: himself, others, places, God—we might add to the list the author and the reader of *Light in August.* I shall discuss each of these constituent factors, but at this stage the important point to note is Joe's awareness of his life as a kind of linguistic democracy, a product of voices, including his own, all of whom are contingent in themselves and none of which have individual authority.

Joe's meditations and realisations here render him strikingly akin to some of the products of Bakhtin's thinking on dialogism, heteroglossia, and the chronotope. I have touched on elements of these notions in my discussion of Thomas Sutpen, but they are worth further consideration here. I will argue that Joe's whole existence can be related to Bakhtin's conception of language, but as his life is actually framed by the constant and loaded use of certain key terms, such as "Joe Christmas," "Negro," and "nigger," we can begin by considering a literal application. "Christmas," we might feel, is a simple means of referring to a particular individual, but Bakhtin reasons that "no living word relates to its object in a *singular* way:"[3]

> The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value-judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile.[4]

Every word uttered, such as "Christmas," is a living, breathing entity even within itself, its connotations reaching far beyond what might appear to be its clearly defined intention. Plurality is key here, plurality existing in a state of dialogue, a conversational flux that refuses to grant the utterance a static existence, the word encompassing all the connotations, which in turn have practically infinite ramifications. Even while apparently directed towards a clearly identified object, the word enters into an endless dialogue of possibilities, impressions, and intentions. As such, the utterance is steeped in *anticipation;* even at its inception, it is dialogically predisposed towards an other:

> The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue.[5]

Taking this in the broadest context in which it is intended—that of the machinations of the novel—we can easily apply such ideas to Faulkner. Bakhtin posits such processes as being fundamental to the very operations of language itself, claiming the novel as the aesthetic form most able to manifest such linguistic complexity. However, it is tempting to claim exemplary status for Faulkner's work on these grounds—as Bakhtin himself had done earlier for Dostoevsky, before qualifying his argument to apply to novelistic discourse in general—particularly as so many of his books seem to be actively constructed with such dialogic bricks and mortar: the dialogue is often the dramatic point, as well as the dramatic agent.

This active dramatising of dialogic theory, as well as its inevitable presence in Faulkner's work,[6] can productively be seen to operate within the fictive world created in the dialogic space of the novel itself. This is readily apparent with regard to Bakhtin's related discussion of heteroglossia, the diversity of languages used within a work, which inevitably correspond with each other, whether willed to or not. This goes from the regional dialect often exploited by an author—not least Faulkner, of course—to suggest and dramatise social relations, history and attitudes, to the application of "literary language," itself heteroglot, in relation to it. Taken in conjunction with the dialogic, it is clear that the author's voice, while vital, is no more so than the other voices to be found at every level of the narrative, from within the word to within the crowd.

It is not difficult to see how Faulkner deliberately exploits this facet of linguistic construction in much of his work, perhaps most obviously in *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying,* wherein the explicit heteroglossia of the novel itself is juxtaposed with dialogic *failure* between the characters, and *Absalom, Absalom!,* whose form and content are inextricable from each other precisely because of the socio-linguistic network Bakhtin addresses with such terms. *Light in August* is particularly interesting in this light, however, because of the terribly apparent application of intention in the many strands of Yoknapatawphan heteroglossia it depicts. This novel is constructed not only by the numerous voices that exist in its heteroglot nature, but also by the explicit and necessary consideration of the effects of their interaction.

Each voice present applies itself in particular to Joe Christmas, bringing with it a potentially infinite battery of connotations, each meaning a particular thing when using words like "Christmas" or "nigger," and each immediately and automatically entering and contributing to the endless dialogic web that is the linguistic world.

The relevance of such concepts to my study of the readerly/writerly construction of Yoknapatawpha is to be found in the *mental* nature of their operations. Much of the county's creation occurs in the dialogic relations between the heteroglot languages of the series. Yoknapatawpha is a state of mind as much as anything else, an evolving, living, collective environment that we, its ultimate readers, keep alive: this will be discussed at county-level in Chapter Twelve. Joe Christmas himself most usefully acts as a focus for a Bakhtinian reading of *Light in August* if we relate him to another of Bakhtin's key concepts, the term that he uses to bring together, in effect, his considerations of dialogism and heteroglossia: the chronotope. Bakhtin posits this as "the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied:"[7]

> Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins. . . . [T]he chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel's abstract elements—philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect—gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work.[8]

One could say, indeed, that the chronotope functions as the site for each dialogic relationship, where the relationships are given actual form, where, in fact, the life of the novel in all its plurality is contained. Every literary image is chronotopic, and we must be aware of the distinctions between what exists *among* chronotopes and what is *between* them: this is where the "continual mutual interaction" between "work" and "world," as discussed in my Chapter Four in relation to Sutpen, becomes important.[9] What marks Joe Christmas out as a particularly effective manifestation of chronotopic action is his active presence within the represented world of the novel as such, as well as his functioning on the "literary" level of the "real world" to focus *Light in August.* On a Yoknapatawphan level he does indeed give the voices "flesh and blood." As such, Bakhtin's warnings about confusing "work" and "world" perhaps need to be treated carefully: in

examining Joe Christmas's engagement with his environment we may need to consider how distinguishable they really are, quite apart from the relationship of "his" world with "ours." We might even see Joe as what Bakhtin tentatively recognises as "a special *creative* chronotope inside which this exchange between work and life occurs, and which constitutes the distinctive life of the work."[10] Joe Christmas, insofar as he exists both as a man and as a literary image, as the meeting of "a myriad sounds . . . which were his life," *is* a chronotope.[11]

To consider Joe's identity, therefore, is to engage with a network of voices each trying to "write" him, and each consciously and unconsciously "reading" him simultaneously, receiving the influence of other elements of his dialogic presence. Prominent among these, of course, are the contributions of Faulkner (or perhaps we should say the novel's highly ambiguous authorial voice), the reader, and Christmas himself, all of whom I shall discuss in turn, with reference to other theories of reading already considered as well as to an old debate in Faulkner scholarship over how far Joe can be said to have any control over his "fate." To study Yoknapatawpha's troubled construction of Christmas, however, is in large part to examine its construction of itself, its codes and its apparently irresolvable conflicts; and its varying use of certain key words and concepts in relation to Joe operates as an active manifestation of Bakhtin's dialogic theories.

"Get me a nigger," says Sheriff Watt, in the aftermath of the discovery of Joanna Burden's body in the burning house. In this one command he encapsulates a mode of thinking that characterises Yoknapatawpha's system of racial codes. The assumption is that any "nigger" will do, just as it is taken as read that it was "one of them done for her" as soon as the racial element is suggested.[12] The utter impersonality of the sheriff's use of the word displays just how singular his meaning is: the arbitrary "nigger" chosen is bound to know the inhabitants of the "negro" cabin in question, and his individual personality and circumstances are not an issue because they are not granted an existence. The unfortunate man's protest that "[y]ou ought to know where I stay at, white folks" is doubly ironic because it suggests a history of personal harassment with the implication that the harasser does not even recognise his victim.[13] The irony is deepened further when the man reveals that he *does* know who lives in the cabin, but that they are two men he understands to be white.

The sheriff's automatic denial of the individuality of Jefferson's black inhabitants is indicative of the attitude of the white mob who collect at the scene of the crime, "who believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro and who knew, believed, and

hoped that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward."[14] The levels of wilful, though largely oblivious, construction are many: the crowd have decided upon the racial element of the murder, and construct the crime anew according to how it must, therefore, have been. As Miss Burden was killed by somebody now made black through the power of suggestion, it follows that she must have been raped as well. All it has taken, at this point, is the suggestion of a known scoundrel to set the mob's race hatred in motion. What is more, the crowd mixes its professed horror at this murder of a white woman—who during her life was ostracised because of her alleged sympathy for black people—with an active hope that her death had been even more horrific than they know, and this so that their prejudices will be confirmed. Very quickly, the strange murder of Joanna Burden has been turned into a means by which Jefferson's dominant white population will justify its oppression of blacks and validate its fears of the associated "dangers" of miscegenation and passing. "Facts," as such, are an irrelevance that pose little threat to the paradoxically creative and destructive intentions of the mob's communal voice. In this environment, to be a black person is not to be a person at all but a code, a manifestation of an anonymous but ever-threatening mass. We might remember, here, Quentin Compson's reflection in *The Sound and the Fury* that "a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behaviour; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among."[15] We might also, perhaps, reflect upon the irony of a mob apparently thinking as one about a group they deem incapable of individual sentience or significance.

This situation would be striking enough when applied to anybody, whatever their colour, but it is all the more so here because the possibility of Joe's being of mixed race has only just been made generally public. This further goes to show the extent to which behaviour is attributed to racial status, and is in itself independent of the huge, complex history of personal construction that has formed Joe's life and identity up to this point. In terms of the novel, of course, this is far from independent or irrelevant, and the wilful singularising and writing of Joe's action is placed in horrific juxtaposition with the endlessly plural, heteroglot nature of his person. Tellingly, the majority of the "myriad sounds" that constitute Joe's being—noted exceptions being Joe himself, the authorial voice, and, hopefully, the reader—each view him in a similarly singular fashion, and react to him or attempt to mould him accordingly. The mob are only the most extreme social version of a trend Joe has been dealing with all his life in one form or another. What is interesting when considering Joe as a product of social heteroglossia is that each of these voices assumes an authority over his identity, attempting to

write him to an absolute design, while their relative disparity as a collective—or, indeed, a chronotope in the person of Joe—serves to undermine just such absolute textual authority. I shall return to the heteroglossic nature of Joe's life in due course, as well as to the involvement of the authorial and other narrative voices and the reader of the novel; beforehand, however, we should examine some of these presumptive, prescriptive voices that would write Joe, and attempt to understand them in terms of the reader-writer relations we have been considering thus far.

The three characters who have the most direct effect upon the development of Joe's character are "Uncle Doc" Hines, Simon McEachern and Joanna Burden, and it is in relation to these pivotal figures that we might question distinctions between "readers" and "writers" in relation to the "text" of Joe Christmas. To an extent our response to this problem is related to how we feel about Alfred Kazin's influential view of Joe as a "*tabula rasa,* a white sheet of paper on which anyone can write out an identity for him and make him believe it."[16] This description is useful, if wilfully one-sided, and in conjunction with the novel's frequent references to the "parchment colour"[17] of Joe's skin emphasises the "written" nature of Joe's existence as "nothing but the man things are done to."[18] Hines and McEachern certainly see Joe in this way, though there are crucial differences between their understandings, and it is Joanna's final attempt to force him into a singular identity that provokes his fatal response. Crucially, each of these characters is driven by their religious convictions, which infuse their respective attitudes towards Joe. In thinking of Christmas as a profoundly "literary" character, as a Yoknapatawphan embodiment of the Bakhtinian chronotope as well as a prime novelistic example of the principle, we might consider how these figures relate to Joe as a text, and the extent to which they themselves are involved as readers and/or writers.

Although it is the dietician's vicious, accusatory "little nigger bastard!" that we register as the first explicit factoring of race in Joe's early life in the orphanage,[19] we soon become aware, as she does, of the malevolent influence of Doc Hines, the janitor of whom "she had been aware for five years now without once having actually looked at him."[20] When she confronts him, he proclaims that Joe is "a sign and a damnation for bitchery."[21] Hines's relationship with Joe and society at large is a complex matter that may be considered with further reference to the kind of reader-writer relationships to be found surrounding John Sartoris, though in this case the breakdown of definitions is more severe. Like Sartoris, Hines is a dealer in what Barthes identifies (negatively) as a "classic" text, but in his case the text is not his own but the word of God—or so he would have us believe, and probably believes himself.[22] He conducts his entire life in accordance with his comprehension

of God, but this is of an intensity that constantly blurs the boundaries between writer and reader, as well as Walker Gibson's "speaker" and "mock reader:"[23]

> I know evil. Aint I made evil to get up and walk God's world? A walking pollution in God's own face I made it. Out of the mouths of little children He never concealed it. You have heard them. I never told them to say it, to call him in his rightful nature, by the name of his damnation. . . . They knowed. They was told, but it wasn't by me. I just waited, on His own good time, when He would see fitten to reveal it to His living world. And it's come now. This is the sign, wrote again in womansinning and bitchery.[24]

While Hines seems to be assigning himself to a role of readership in this passage, "waiting" on God to instruct him, we can sense even at this early stage an acute awareness of writerly aspirations, if not powers. This is primarily directed towards the infant Joe, "the name of his damnation" being "nigger," but Joe also represents the factor by which Hines attempts to identify himself. With his references to signs, Hines appears to be setting himself up as a kind of perfect interpreter of God's meaning, a self-appointed version of the ideal mock reader of Gibson's model, taking his rigid, unshakeable reading to realise the meaning of the text. But in seeing Joe as a feature of that text, Hines immediately grants himself more authorial duties. Though it is not clear at the time, Hines's references to the "evil" he has "made" are about his being Joe's grandfather, and thereby having a direct part to play in the realisation of God's purpose. As a textual element, the "speaker" figure as regards Joe is Hines himself: Joe is "the Lord God's abomination, and I am the instrument of His will."[25] To apply Gibson's terminology to this situation is, of course, to come at it backwards, but Faulkner again dramatises much of what can be seen in the dynamics of the theory, or rather, in this case again, the comparative confusion in those dynamics. Can we separate the roles of (mock) reader and writer/speaker here? Hines likes to present himself as receiving God's instructions passively; his singular interpretation of it, however, immediately becomes a cast-iron writing of God, himself, Joe and the world. If Joe represents a perverse manifestation of God's "classic" text, then Hines must act as his appointed reader precisely because of his role in his creation. It is the *identification* with God that removes Hines from the passive role he believes himself to occupy.

This becomes all the more apparent when he relates his version of Joe's conception, referring to himself in the third person:

> Till nigh daybreak he worked, believing she had obeyed the command of the father the Lord had given her. But he ought to knowed. He ought to knowed God's abomination of womanflesh; he should have knowed the walking shape of bitchery and abomination already stinking in God's sight. Telling old Doc Hines, that knowed better, that he was a Mexican. When old Doc Hines could see in his face the black curse of God Almighty.[26]

Hines takes on a deliberately authorial role, including himself as a character in God's drama. But as self-appointed "speaker" within God's text, he grants himself sole control over the presentation and meaning of the events he relates, and positions himself very close to the ultimate author. Though his understanding of events is an interpretation, and an extreme, idiosyncratic one at that, he posits it as intractable fact. He has no basis in empirical "fact" for insisting upon Joe's "black" blood, but because he has decided on God's curse, so it must be. Even as speaker within the text, then, Hines seems to be overstepping the bounds of Gibson's model: is he not here exercising somewhat greater power than he claims? Rather than being "the instrument of His will," Hines ultimately places himself on a similar, perhaps identical plane: he admonishes the dietician not to "lie to me, to the Lord God,"[27] before condemning her "Womanfilth. . . . Before the face of God."[28] It is hard to see any space between Hines's understanding of God and his own position. The ferocity of his fanaticism effectively reverses the two, and God essentially becomes the instrument of Doc Hines's will. Borrowing his wife's terminology, he similarly contorts the devil into his practice: "My wife has bore me a whore. But at least he done what he could when the time come to collect. He showed me the right road and he held the pistol steady."[29] While ostensibly painting himself as under the control of heavenly or demonic forces, he actually employs these very figures to justify, explain and realise his own desires and fears. Doc Hines's writing of Joe's identity is absolute, and while he calls upon higher authorities to validate his reading and absolve his own responsibility, he in effect takes ultimate authorial control over them all.

As well as showing an engagement with elements of Gibson's theory of mock-reader- and writership, and working to confuse them thoroughly, this has some echoes of Norman N. Holland's suggestion that "all of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves."[30] While the ideas of Gibson and Holland are at odds in many ways, they are interesting in this context because the sheer ambiguity of reader-writer roles in *Light in August* undermines the clear boundaries that both identify between roles. The idea of "replication" might be seen most readily in the

case of Joe's foster-father Simon McEachern, who views him for the first time with "the same stare with which he might have examined a horse or a second hand plow, convinced beforehand that he would see flaws, convinced beforehand that he would buy."[31] McEachern's motivations are somewhat different from Hines's, though his religious convictions are hardly less fanatical. He has no knowledge of Joe's racial ambiguity, and takes the child on with a deliberate dismissal of his origins as "no matter,"[32] promising to mould him according to his strict Presbyterian beliefs, including replacing Joe's "heathenish" surname with his own: "He will eat my bread and he will observe my religion. . . . Why should he not bear my name?"[33]

Clearly, any personality or identity that Joe might have developed up to this stage is negated by McEachern, and his apparently "blank" origin in fact renders him perfect for McEachern's purpose. Whereas Hines takes over control of Joe's identity according to his perception of what he is, McEachern applies a preconceived view of him as a sinful being and resolves to turn him around to "fear God and abhor idleness and vanity despite his origin."[34] Joe himself is irrelevant. McEachern represents an extreme example of a reader attempting to "replicate" himself in the text, the child Joe being, again, a facet of that text to which McEachern so slavishly devotes himself. Indeed, the presence of "the book" in McEachern's rearing of Joe is overwhelming: when Joe fails to learn the catechism adequately he is beaten, but only when "the book" is present. McEachern's own devotion to the words laid down might imply a wilful self-negation on his own part, in that he will conduct himself only as directed by this greater authority. But this apparent passivity is reversed in his application of the same principles to others—chiefly his wife and Joe. Unlike Hines, he does not place himself upon the same pedestal as God—indeed, he orders his wife to "ask grace and pardon of God; not of me"[35]—but he is nonetheless tyrannical in enforcing his reading of scripture onto those around him, accepting no deviation. While his life is formed by text, in his eyes, he must use this textual validation to create others in his image. Hence, he comes to the infant Joe Christmas with a self-regarding picture of how the boy's life and identity will form, or rather be formed by him. Again we might ask, where does this devoted reader of texts become the authoritative writer of them? Are the processes separable?

The dominant ancestor of Joanna Burden, Calvin Burden, bears relation in differing ways to each of Joe's other religious father-figures. Like McEachern, while "no proselyter, missionary," he pledges to "beat the loving God" into his family "as long as I can raise my arm."[36] Like Hines, his racism is based upon his manipulation of religious structures to his own paradoxically abolitionist ends:

> "Damn, lowbuilt black folks: low built because of the weight of the wrath of God, black because of the sin of human bondage staining their blood and flesh." His gaze was vague, fanatical, and convinced. "But we done freed them now, both black and white alike. They'll bleach out now. In a hundred years they will be white folks again. Then maybe we'll let them come back into America."[37]

This, and her father's description of blacks as "a race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sins," feed down into Joanna's confused, fatal reactions to the figure of Joe Christmas.[38] Developing from considering her black neighbours as "furniture" to her visions of a "black shadow in the shape of a cross" falling onto every white baby,[39] her responses to Joe range from rejection of her religious upbringing in the form of extreme sexual behaviour (including crying out "Negro! Negro! Negro!" during sex[40]), to her demands that Joe declare himself as black and pray at gunpoint. Like the Sartoris family against which her ancestry has been so pitted, Joanna's heritage bequeaths her an unmanageable family code that she struggles to conform to. Haunted by the images fed to her by her ancestors, she is, like young Bayard Sartoris, torn between full acceptance and outright rejection of this code; when she attempts to force her confusion onto the already complex Christmas, the results, of course, are deadly.

These major figures, then, as well as numerous other minor or collective characters, each seek to impose a fixed identity upon Joe Christmas. Together, these form a collection of disparate but intransigent readings, each attempting to write Joe according to a particular set of codes. That *all* of these influences are present in Joe's identity does, of course, invalidate their would-be dominance as individual voices, but they are undoubtedly among the more prominent of the "myriad" sounds that form Joe's heteroglot existence, not least because of the space given to them in the novel. Taken singly or together, they would also rather seem to support Kazin's view of Joe as a *tabula rasa,* a formless being ultimately formed by the forces of society. McEachern, certainly, himself seems to view Joe specifically in this way, and Hines and Joanna, while they actively engage with what they perceive to be his identity, essentially negate the man himself. But while this model is helpful with regard to the relationships that Joe has with certain individuals, and perhaps even with society at large, it wilfully neglects another crucial voice in the equation: that of Joe himself.

We might note that "the man things are done to," in Kazin's words, in fact does rather a lot himself; indeed, *Light in August*'s famously circuitous

structure owes much of its dynamic to certain seminal acts or thoughts of Joe Christmas. His story is, it is true, marked by Joe's frequent reflection that "*Something is going to happen to me. I am going to do something,*" but this is a mantra that complements its own fatalistic air with a self-awareness that rather undermines the idea of Joe as wholly passive.[41] Indeed, this italicised reflection brings into focus both aspects of this issue: Joe feels that he will both be affected *and* will affect. We could, perhaps, go along with the deterministic view of Joe insofar as the novel would seem to suggest the formative influence of those around him; indeed, it puts this forth as its thesis on race as a social construct. But we have to recognise that Joe is not only cognisant of these influences, but actively engages with them both to develop as an individual within himself and in contrast to the varying social identities he is given, and to act upon and in the world at large. Were his actions presented only as mechanical responses, we could possibly view Joe as a blank consciousness; that large tracts of the novel are based upon his own tortured reflections on and appraisals of his life point to conscious attempts at self-creation that can even be paralleled with the creative urges of a Sutpen or a Snopes. For Joe Christmas, to read his own life and the elements that go towards making it is effectively to write himself into being *for himself;* and as society seems determined to construct him as it sees fit, his own mental formation of himself, however successful, is vital to his survival.

The large section of the novel that essentially constitutes a flashback over the thirty-three years of Joe's life begins at a point of high tension, as Joe approaches Joanna's house equipped with his razor and his myriad sounds. This technique of interrupting the narrative at a cliff-hanger is one exploited even more extensively in *Absalom, Absalom!,* but as with the later novel this is no mere frustrating literary artfulness. In turning to Joe's history at the very point in the "present" in which he is going to commit perhaps his most defining act, Faulkner makes plain the fundamental importance of what has gone before in what is about to happen, this including such voices as I have already discussed. But what follows is not just an account of the forces that have shaped Joe, but also his shaping of himself both during his development and as a thinking, interpretive, creative being now. This is indicated by the famous "equation" that begins this section of the novel:

> Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long gabled cold echoing building of dark red brick sootbleakened by more chimneys than its own,. . . . orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing

> constant as the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacenting chimneys streaked like black tears.[42]

A classic example of Faulknerian diction, this passage aligns what follows with the framework of Joe's own consciousness and evokes the mental processes behind it. The authorial voice becomes a kind of free indirect stream-of-consciousness, the long, adjective-laden sentences reminiscent of the cumulative wordplay in parts of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* The "equation" itself has great importance to the flashback as a whole, siting it as the at least partial product of an imagination both created by and creating it. The wilful power of belief is paramount here, the active construction of events in memory, whether conscious or otherwise, taking mental precedence over knowledge, recollection or even conjecture. So however strong the writerly influence of society is on Joe's life, at a narrative level these influences themselves are subject, ultimately, to the constructive efforts of his own mind.

The implication of this passage and its placement within the novel, while it has an important role in the overall plot-development (or, perhaps, plot-disruption), is that Joe is at least partially responsible for "writing" himself, even as this takes the form of an apparently automatic "reading" of his life at a moment of supreme crisis. Therefore, his own voice commands a vital position in the dialogic network that constitutes his existence. But this is only the most extreme example of his taking responsibility for himself; within the flashback itself, there is a gradually developing process of self-realisation and experimentation with the series of strict frameworks he is forced to work in. At the orphanage, he is soon conscious of his apparent difference in the minds of others, even if only because of the attentions of the janitor, his unidentified grandfather Hines. Even while he is unsure, as a young child, of the meaning and resonance of this difference, he unconsciously identifies it as an essential facet of his being when McEachern announces his intention to give Joe his own name:

> The child was not listening. He was not bothered. He did not especially care, anymore than if the man had said the day was hot when it was not hot. He didn't even bother to say to himself *My name aint McEachern. My name is Christmas* There was no need to bother about that yet. There was plenty of time.[43]

Later, Joe will say those words out loud to Bobbie in a vocal expression of his self-identity. Here, however, the self represented by the name "*Christmas*" is

the very core of his largely inarticulate being, and McEachern's protestations to the contrary are as irrelevant and inane to him as Joe's own individuality is to his foster-father. This, of course, is on a level deeper even than that usually suggested by Faulkner's use of italics, through being presented in the negative: despite his immaturity and lack of advanced comprehension of his situation, he is subconsciously claiming the identity, the difference embodied in the name he was given when he was delivered to the orphanage. Kazin suggests that "'Joe Christmas' is worse than any real name could be" because it indicates the sheer extent of his rootlessness and lack of identity, but surely the important point here is that Joe takes the negative implied by his name and claims it for himself.[44] True, it is a name arbitrarily given by strangers—any child turning up that night would probably have been called "Christmas"—but in identifying himself with it he embraces all that this emptiness allows. His name may signify a lack of identity, or a nebulous identity imposed by others, but his adherence to it and the ambiguities and connotations it has turns this formlessness into a defining characteristic.

This is Joe's crucial approach as a creative agent, if anything the most constructive and transformative in the book, and it manifests itself dramatically during his childhood and adolescence on the McEachern farm. For it is here that Joe begins to act upon the unconscious but powerful assertion of selfhood at the orphanage to subvert his deemed absence with, if anything, a surplus of identity rather than a lack of it. While he is with the McEacherns, there is no explicit reason for his racial uncertainty to emerge, but Joe begins to take mental control over who he is, taking the ambiguities of his existence and experimenting with them. Sometimes this engagement seems to be largely beyond his control: for instance, when he and his friends attempt to lose their virginity with a young black girl and he finds himself looking "down into a black well. . . . enclosed by the womanshenegro and the haste" and beats her savagely instead.[45] In Joe's mind, his "haste" is automatically linked with his memory of the toothpaste he gorged himself upon before his discovery by the dietician in her room at the orphanage, clearly linking this to that original confluence of race, sex and identity. This is continued later when he begins to take more mental control of such issues, fantasising about daring Mrs McEachern to tell her husband that "he has nursed a nigger beneath his own roof, with his own food at his own table."[46]

But it is in his relationship with Bobbie Allen that Joe begins consciously and explicitly to bring the complexities of his identity into play in the world at large. When she asks his name, he replies that "It's not McEachern. . . . It's Christmas," pushing his appropriation of his self-identity upon a situation wherein his immediate audience would be unaware of either name

or what they signified.[47] Later, after they have slept together, he tells her, "I think I got some nigger blood in me. . . . I dont know. I believe I have."[48] Here, Joe deliberately forces the difficulty of the situation, though at this stage he lets it go when Bobbie refuses to take him at his word. After he has left McEachern for dead at the dance, he returns to take money from the house, repudiating the ever-kind Mrs McEachern with the declaration that "I didn't ask, because I was afraid you would give it to me. I just took it. Dont forget that."[49] Each of these situations, in their varying ways, represent attempts by Joe to assert his own will upon his life and identity: he could have got away with being considered merely "foreign" by Bobbie, just as he could have accepted the kindness of his foster mother, but his refusal to do either indicates his need to define *himself* in the face of society's need or desire to do it for him.

Joe's final confrontation with Bobbie and her pimps is laden with ironic possibility. Her outrage is expressed in what may be fairly standard, meaningless insults: "Bastard! Son of a bitch!" But these insults take on much greater weight because of their being based in issues of parentage, which, of course, is at the very crux of the situation. Bobbie now uses Joe's earlier confession against him, unwittingly pointing to his own construction of the situation: "He told me himself he was a nigger!. . . . Me taking for nothing a nigger son of a bitch that would get me in a jam with clodhopper police."[50] Her only frame of reference for this is Joe himself, whose own lack of foundation is ironically reflected upon by the voices he senses above him as he lies semi-conscious after his beating:

> *Bitching up as sweet a little setup as I could have wanted*
> *He ought to stay away from bitches*
> *He cant help himself. He was born too close to one*
> *Is he really a nigger? He dont look like one*
> *That's what he told Bobbie one night. But I guess she still dont know any more about what he is that he does. These country bastards are liable to be anything*[51]

After all the speculation, then, Joe is dismissed as a "*country bastard,*" which in the speaker's idiom could indeed mean virtually anything. Vicious, violent and bigoted though these sentiments may be, they pinpoint precisely the malleability which Joe uses as his primary weapon. It is the very "telling" that the voices speak of that stops him from being nothing, that enables him to use the restrictive, prescriptive codes of the South in order to become, in James A. Snead's words, "the sign of resistance to fixed signs."[52] To an extent,

at least, this and the many challenges he puts out to blacks and whites, men and women, over the following years on the road reflect his potential not to be nothing, as Kazin and others suggest, but, rather, "*anything.*" In his own outrage at Bobbie's disgust, Joe reflects "in a slow amazement: *Why, I committed murder for her,*" despite his braining McEachern rather more for himself.[53] More importantly, Joe does not even know whether his foster father *is* dead—neither he nor we ever find this out—but, like Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, he claims personal constructive responsibility for an ultimately ambiguous but potentially definitive act.[54] We never know just how early we can, in fact, call Joe a murderer, but his own self-designation as such is crucial to his idea of himself and, therefore, the overall heteroglossia of his being.

None of this is to deny the overwhelming effect of society's writing of him, or the fatalism which he feels himself and which is frequently attributed to him by the authorial voice. But to attempt to understand Joe Christmas, we must give due attention to his own engagement with fate. Not long before he kills her, Joe fleetingly considers marrying Joanna:

> And then something in him flashed *Why not? It would mean ease, security, for the rest of your life. You would never have to move again. And you might as well be married to her as this* thinking, "No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be."[55]

It is impossible to identify the ultimate authority in Joe's closing thought here. Is Joe the product of his own "choice" not to "give in," or rather of the thirty years, and all that they entail, that seem to be both the cause and effect of that choice? Indeed, we and he are constantly faced with the problem of whether Joe himself is cause or effect, and we must surely conclude that he is neither and both, which is to say that we cannot conclude at all.

This goes some way towards elucidating my proposition that Joe Christmas can be considered as a dramatic embodiment of the Bakhtinian chronotope, the place in the Yoknapatawphan text where the "myriad sounds," including the creative input of his own voice, meet and take on life. In Joe's intricate relationship with society there is a virtually endless network of attempts at reader- and writership, none of which can be considered definitive and all of which have a crucial part to play. We are forced to consider, in relation to this, what distinctions can actually be made between reading and writing, as Joe and his many co-creators seem to be engaging in activities that could justifiably be identified as either or both. The substance

of this discussion will follow in my concluding chapter on the readerly-writerly construction of Yoknapatawpha as a whole, but before this we need to look closely at the roles played by figures not ostensibly in Yoknapatawpha itself but, as discussed in Part One, crucially involved in its creation: the author and the reader of the novel, *Light in August.*

Joe's first entrance into the novel at the beginning of Chapter 2 is through another man's memory of what others said about him in the past:

> Byron Bunch knows this: It was one Friday morning three years ago. And the group of men at work in the planer shed looked up, and saw the stranger standing there, watching them. . . . He did not look like a professional hobo in his professional rags, but there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town or city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home. And that he carried his knowledge with him always as though it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely, and almost proud. "As if," as the men said later, "he was just down on his luck for a time, and that he didn't intend to stay down on it and didn't give a damn how much he rose up."[56]

This is character-creation, and indeed history, in the form of multiple recollection, and in its style is perhaps similar to the narrative voice used in sections of *The Hamlet* and *The Mansion,* where the authorial voice merges with a social collective consciousness. The account of Joe's appearance here is also similar to that of Thomas Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson in *Absalom, Absalom!,* in that it takes the form of a kind of oral legend, before we are allowed near the man himself. Just as Sutpen seems to grow out of the "steady strophe and antistrophe" of voices[57]—the intrinsic call-and-response process that Bakhtin posits as fundamental to language—so Joe here is founded in the reader's consciousness in the spaces between the men's initial conception of him as "definitely rootless" (a most evocative Faulknerian oxymoron), with a particular kind of "knowledge" and "pride," their *later* words about him, and Byron's memory of these stages. This approach is important: rather than just tell us about Joe, the authorial voice tells us about an individual perception of a collective consciousness of him, immediately foregrounding his heteroglot existence. Crucially, author and reader are involved as well: the reader is probably inclined to come from this passage with an initial impression of Joe, but we are not "given" this by the authorial voice: rather, we are presented with a dialogue out of which we must come to our own conclusions. We might say that our impression is validated by the men's words, but the "rootlessness" we sense is all the more striking through our inability even to

place Joe firmly in this narrative construct. Faulkner's decision to give *ideas* of Joe, rather than Joe himself, is a recognition that this is necessarily all he *can* do, as well as pointing to his own role as a reader as well as writer.[58]

Similarly, the reader is immediately implicated in Jefferson's perception of Joe's otherness. From the first, as discussed above, Joe is public property: what this passage also does is ensure that we are part of that public. Because we, like Byron, make our judgments on the basis of social dialogue, however unitary it may appear, our "version" of Joe becomes part of that exchange; this, in turn, lends the dialogue itself a very active quality in that the readership *within* the novel continues to live and develop in the readership *of* it. This is not to say, as Stanley Fish would have it, that Joe is completely at our interpretive mercy—nor, as I hope to have shown, that of anyone or everyone else.[59] We are still working with the materials available to us, and, as Wolfgang Iser suggests, it is in the decisions we make about these that the text, and in this case an early version of Joe Christmas, comes to life.[60] At this stage in our perception of Joe, we are more bound than we later become by the tangible voices before us, and, as such, Faulkner's control of information is fundamental to our own shaping of the text: this has much in common with our creative relationship with Faulkner in, for instance, the first section of *The Sound and the Fury.*

Indeed, it is in this way that the reader is brought into the novel in a most important fashion. Much of *Light in August*'s power comes from what many commentators agree to be its severe criticism of Southern racial codes,[61] but while the liberal reader—or rather, we might say, the reader who has taken on board the structure and content of the novel—may express horror at the mob's (re)construction of Joanna's death following Brown's painting of Joe as a black murderer of a white woman, Faulkner strongly challenges our own right to condemn so comfortably. If one is tempted to go along with the construction of Joe as we first view him, because of the lack of any conflicting evidence and the apparent soundness of the reading, how do we stand when it comes to the question of his racial ambiguity? The first suggestion of the issue comes with the mill foreman's asking, "Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas?"[62] But while we may question the moral quality of this question, how long is it before we are inclined to challenge its validity? We may feel outrage at society's construction of Joe along its own preconceived racial lines, but how long is it, at least on a first reading, before we reflect that the very notion of his "mixed blood" may be a fallacy, regardless of our feelings on how this might affect his character? Just because we may pride ourselves on having a less eugenic outlook does not mean that we are immune to the suggestions of such figures as Joe Brown: for a long time,

there is little, if anything, in the narrative to make us believe that Christmas does *not* have some black parentage. Are we, then, just as culpable in the construction of race as the Jefferson society we try to pass judgement on?

Faulkner's handling of this point is one of the most effective elements of *Light in August,* and a reason why it is such a genuinely challenging work. Of course, in subsequent readings we will probably engage in Iser's "advance retrospection," and apply our knowledge of information yet to come to the earlier stages of the narrative.[63] However, in our first reading, we are bound by our ignorance, our understanding of the world of the text created through having to fill in its gaps, and as such it is more than likely that we will accept the social view of Joe's ancestry, despite the lack of any firm evidence either way—a lack that is never resolved. As such, Faulkner's text engages in a complex way with Iser's point about the reader's involvement with the text:

> The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be *different* from his own. . . . Thus we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own.[64]

Faulkner exploits this aspect of readership by making his polyphonic narrative lead us in a certain way while still requiring our cognitive interaction to make it live. As such, the "self" that we see in the literary "mirror" is liable to be one that may disagree with Yoknapatawphan politics, but is utterly complicit in its construction of identity—in this case racial. To an even greater degree than *Sanctuary, Light in August* forces us to recognise that reading is a far from innocent act, and that if we are to take part in this creative exercise we must be prepared to take on the moral responsibilities and realisations that such an enterprise entails. In this way, Joe Christmas becomes a black man because *we,* as much as anybody else, say he is, even as we recognise the same fatal tendencies in others. And if we are to take this engagement with the text as seriously as surely we must, we also need to take heed of Judith Bryant Wittenberg's valuable point that, by this token, "apparently white" characters, as much as those apparently black, are only so because it is said that they are.[65]

Wittenberg's observation is a marker of the degree to which more recent criticism of *Light in August* has engaged with these fundamental narrative matters, both as a way of further analysing the novel's treatment of race, in Heinz Ickstadt's words, "not as biological difference but as an aspect of

discourse," and to interrogate Faulkner's and the reader's position with the regard to the racial codes of Yoknapatawpha.[66] This interrogation goes much deeper than Myra Jehlen's general dismissal of the novel on the grounds that it shows Faulkner himself to be racist, and is itself shaped by those racist feelings—an argument that, while making some perfectly valid points, is undermined by Jehlen's own determination to see Joe only as black and to claim that the novel's final word is founded on Gavin Stevens's "silly last speech."[67] James A. Snead, while similarly conscious of Faulkner's own sometimes racist inclinations, is more prepared to consider his engagement with this in terms of the narrative voice:

> In *Light in August* Faulkner diverges from Fielding's omniscient narrators or Conrad's or James's unreliable ones by exposing omniscience as unreliability. The unreliability is an active deception. There is no deficiency, of either intelligence or perspicacity: the narrator is actively creating error. Society here turns arbitrary codes of dominance into "fact." To make matters worse, the reader helps to accomplish the entire process.[68]

While this is directed at such narrative complexities as I have discussed above, Snead also, rightly, challenges some of the authorial voice's more overt racial stereotyping—its frequent references to the smells, jobs, mentality of African Americans. This, of course, is never as simple as it may initially appear, and presents the reader with a further challenge beyond our realisation of complicity in Jefferson's racism. "Faulkner gives us the choice to be racists in a very cunning way," says Snead. "[D]o we passively accept the truth of the narrator's judgment and thereby ourselves join the town's consensus? Or do we suspend our own judgment for the sake of fairness?"[69] There is no denying the discomfort one is liable to feel when faced with an authorial description of a black nursemaid with "the vacuous idiocy of her idle and illiterate kind,"[70] and Snead is probably right to suggest that Faulkner shares the town's "conservative compulsion to impose order,"[71] but surely our duty goes further than merely measuring our own politics against those of the narrator? I would suggest that even at points such as this, the authorial voice is far from singular. In this instance, it is following the consciousness of Gail Hightower; in the controversial description of Joe's journey through Freedman Town, the racial attributes expressed must be read in the context of the narrative's close following of Christmas's consciousness, thereby prominently including his voice. This is neither to deny nor excuse the racism in Faulkner: crucially he attempts to do neither himself. Faulkner's keen awareness of himself as a product of his environment is evident throughout his work: even as he rails against the South's

atrocities he makes no attempt to deny his own culpability as a Southerner, however comparatively liberal he may be. The problem that Snead identifies is, of course, all part of the novel's conceit. Nobody escapes interrogation, and that very much includes the author and the reader.

These recognitions are hugely important, both serving to enforce the novel's meditation upon the dialogic construction of identity—a dialogue in which Jefferson society, Joe himself, Faulkner and ourselves are involved—and requiring us to ask awkward moral questions of ourselves with relation to it. It is this prompting of *self*-realisation in the reader, rather than the overt moral didacticism we might expect to encounter in the kind of text Roland Barthes is inclined to dismiss, that once again illustrates the parallels between acts of reading and writing within the Yoknapatawpha texts and those that go towards constructing them. These processes are at work throughout the Yoknapatawpha series, as I shall discuss in Chapter Twelve, to follow, but can be seen personified in the figure of Joe Christmas. Because the emphasis of *Light in August* is so strongly upon the means by which identity is formed by the "myriad sounds," the voices of readership and writership that weave in and out of every textual possibility, Joe is in many ways an archetypal Yoknapatawphan. He is a Southern chronotope who throws into focus the infinite heteroglossia that works to construct him, and in provoking Yoknapatawpha—himself, his contemporaries, Faulkner and ourselves, and the weight of history—to destroy at the same time as it creates, he forces a process of self-examination that, in the famous words of Joe's death-scene, it is "not to lose."[72]

Chapter Eleven

Anyone Watching Us Can See: The Democracy of Perspective in *As I Lay Dying*

Towards the end of *As I Lay Dying,* the self-proclaimed "respectable druggist" Moseley relates his refusal to sell medicine to a strange, unmarried pregnant girl.[1] At the time, he thinks he is just dealing with a silly, pretty country girl in a fix, and his attitude is a combination of conservative religious self-righteousness, mild lechery, and even milder concern for her plight. But after she has gone, he learns from his assistant that she is far from the strangest visitor to Mottson that day: "Albert told me about the rest of it. . . . It had been dead eight days, Albert said. They had come from some place out in Yoknapatawpha county, trying to get to Jefferson with it. It must have been like a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill . . ."[2] This, in the third published book set there, is the first time that Yoknapatawpha has been identified by name, and we might note that this identification is by someone outside the county, only too keen for its representatives to get back there. Moseley goes on to relate Albert's account of the exchange between the town marshal, trying to clear them out of town, and the apparent head of the family:

> "We're doing the best we can," the father said. Then he told a long tale about how they had to wait for the wagon to come back and how the bridge was washed away and how they went eight miles to another bridge and it was gone too so they came back and swum the ford and the mules got drowned and how they got another team and found that the road was washed out and they had to come around by Mottson, and then the one with the cement came back and told him to shut up.[3]

This is an at least third-hand, simplistic one-sentence summary of the Bundren family's journey so far, a story that we have hitherto seen unfold in complex, dialogic fashion. But when it comes down to it, this is basically what has happened: Moseley gives us an outsider's appropriation of the tale of a group of Yoknapatawphans who have been struggling to wend their way through the county, have been temporarily forced out, and have their return to it as their goal. Given how involved we have become in the story so far, this at first seems a stunningly insensitive account, perhaps of similar effect to the one-page synopsis of the Sutpen story by Bayard Sartoris in *The Unvanquished* (discussed in my final chapter, to follow). But it is also a valid and in some ways understandable reading and rewriting of the situation from someone with only a partial view on matters: Moseley cannot know that "the father" is Anse Bundren, with all that that entails, for instance. It is also indicative of the ways in which Yoknapatawpha is formed as a concept, as the meeting of myriad elements, in this novel and throughout the series. We have such a response to Moseley's response (and according to him, the response of Mottson's population in general) because of our intricate involvement with the family so far, but his outsider status is also a reminder of our own even as we are also writerly insiders. Furthermore, his bewilderment and repulsion at a rotting corpse being brought into town is only partly unreasonable: however unfeeling, this is yet another view on the Bundrens that enters the Yoknapatawphan dialogue as legitimately as any of the others we have read and helped to construct. We are likely to have much greater sympathy for Dewey Dell, for instance, from our far greater knowledge of her, and the same goes for the rest of the family, but this is Moseley's sole brush with the Bundrens and with the reader—and we might note that we hardly get a rounded view of him, for his part. Indeed, Moseley works as an archetypal partial reader of Yoknapatawpha: his involvement is fleeting but constitutive, and it has the same effect on him: safe to say, he will never forget the day he had *this* on his doorstep.

On a crude level, Moseley's blinkered verdict on the Bundrens from his one engagement with them might be akin to a reader's view of Yoknapatawpha from only reading, say, *As I Lay Dying,* and none of the other novels. Furthermore, as "a man just hasn't got the time they have out there," the pharmacist does not seem willing to consider the variables of their situation having fixed on his own reductive assessment.[4] But this still does not negate his part in the creation of Yoknapatawpha, as he has entered its life just as it has entered his. He is a useful indicator both of this novel's processes and of ways in which its reading might be seen as an paradigm of the approach we need to apply to the series as a whole. *As I Lay Dying* is a wonderful book

whose importance can be traced in many more ways than I am addressing here; for my purposes, though, I want to consider it as a one-volume condensation of the overall experience and responsibility of reading Yoknapatawpha. My concluding chapter will discuss how the many figures and processes I have been discussing work together across the series as a whole, how the dialogues between Yoknapatawpha's readers and writers bring it into being. Before this, it is useful to look at how such co-operation and conflict also operates in one exemplary text whose internal intertextuality mirrors the series-wide situation.

As I Lay Dying's series of narratives delivered by different characters is, of course, reminiscent of *The Sound and the Fury*'s structure, and there are similarities with as well as significant departures from that novel's uses of subjective voices. *As I Lay Dying* is presented entirely in the first-person (not even *The Sound and the Fury,* for all its famous interiority, managed that), though here there are many more first-persons involved in the telling and a more overt sense of social context. Rather than the four lengthy sections marked by dates of the earlier book, here we have a fairly quick-fire array of attributed voices, both directly involved in the action of the novel and acting as commentators. Though the turnover of voices is comparatively rapid in *As I Lay Dying,* the sections ranging from a single sentence to several pages in length, the creation of its atmosphere is slower and more brooding, cumulatively building the world in which the Bundrens struggle to wend their way. Our impression of a character in both books is given a paradoxically rounded yet fragmented quality by the juxtaposition of his or her own thoughts and commentaries with the similarly constructed external views of other narrators. *As I Lay Dying* is a superlative Yoknapatawphan creation of a novelistic world through the acute, though always fragile, realisation of its constituent parts, the sum being assembled in some way in the reader's mind. The uncomfortable obverse side of this is that we are made fully aware of our still subjective take on the events and characters, and of our intrinsic ignorance being as contributory to Yoknapatawpha as such knowledge as we and all the other readers in and of the book *do* have.

The structural relationship to *The Sound and the Fury* is reasonably clear, differences notwithstanding. Less obviously, perhaps, I would also suggest that *As I Lay Dying* effectively dramatises some of the voyeurism and readerly complicity that so disturbingly electrifies a book like *Sanctuary,* Faulkner's infamous "potboiler." Some idea of this mixture of reader-writer relationships can be gleaned from the opening narrative, delivered by Darl Bundren. Indeed, having noted in Part One that some of the great technical differences between the openings of the other two novels are accentuated by their common theme of watching, the first lines of *As I Lay Dying* begin yet another riff on this theme:

> Jewel and I come up from the field, following the path in single file. Although I am fifteen feet ahead of him, anyone watching us from the cotton-house can see Jewel's frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own.
>
> The path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, between the green rows of laid-by cotton, to the cotton-house in the centre of the field, where it turns and circles the cotton-house at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision.[5]

In some ways reminiscent of the tableau of Popeye and Benbow watching each other across the spring in *Sanctuary,* this is an apparently simple, spare account of the field, path and cotton-house, evoking the heat of the season and the hard work and hard travelling the field has witnessed. It is like a stage description setting the scene on which the action will take place, but whereas we watch Popeye and Benbow's watching with a sense of something inevitably going to happen, here the action is already under way, such as it is, and the watching is of a more involved, conditional kind. What gives the otherwise straightforward description its air of strangeness is the phrase "anyone watching us from the cotton-house can see." Such imaginative displacement of perspective is beyond the capabilities of Benjy Compson, of course, but the certainty of what "anyone . . . can see" has echoes of his unquestioning view of the men hitting in the pasture. This attribution of definiteness to a possibility necessarily rendered unknowable, due to the narrator being one of the watched rather than the watcher, only makes the scene *less* definite. Or perhaps we might say that it renders a scene presented as objective truth all the more subjectively uncertain: "anyone," indeed, can surely see anything depending on any number of factors, as we have already seen in comparing Moseley's limited perspective to our own multiple one. The key here is that the narrative is in the present-tense voice of one of the protagonists, the wider perspective attributed by him to a nebulous observer, single or plural, who may or may not be there. The reader inevitably now watches from the cotton-house too, becoming the "anyone" who we must also watch, seeing Darl and Jewel's relative positions and heights and hats not from the narrator's own vantage point but from another that he effectively creates for us. We watch the scene, therefore, from three simultaneous viewpoints: we are placed outside the action and textual watching by the descriptive prose, but must also inhabit it to realise its dimensions; furthermore, we see things from the perspective of the narrator himself, Darl.

This last may seem a truism, but it is worthy of mention because Darl's perspective encompasses and even creates the others: it sets up a multi-dimensional, almost omniscient view that necessarily imagines even as it asserts. As such, Darl's perspective *is* this multiplicity of perspectives, and as such a paradoxically singular character begins to emerge from these first, scant lines. Of course, notwithstanding the unusual decision to move the view to the cotton-house, one might argue that "anyone . . . can see" is merely a figure of speech, though this still would not detract from the effect. Indeed, the second paragraph returns to his "own" perspective," describing the path that he is walking along and reading its "fading," "precise" testimony of previous walkers—like his own testimony, one of both exactness and plural uncertainty. Even here, though, his walking is not part of the described scene, but rather becomes the point in time where the histories of the field and its historical travellers fleetingly come together. Darl is effectively absent as a character from his own narration here, becoming a space in which myriad other Yoknapatawphan voices meet. His narrative relationship with the path becomes a manifestation of the Bakhtinian chronotope, "time becom[ing], in effect, palpable and visible" as different voices come together in a single image.[6] In this instance, we learn nothing more about these other voices, other than their shadowy presence in time and space, in Darl, but they still serve as a reminder of the plurality of every image, every narrative in Yoknapatawpha. And though Darl may be absent from the scene in which he is present, he continues to grow as a narrative force: the narrative effectively *is* Darl, as in realising it at his subtle direction we realise him. As with Benjy, what we have already is a construction of Darl in our mind; as with Benjy, the reader is hostage to Darl's idiosyncrasy, but also required to realise it.

If we might still be tempted to explain this away more casually as just being Darl's peculiar way of expressing himself, this would be difficult to maintain as he and Jewel approach the cotton-house:

> When we reach it I turn and follow the path which circles the house. Jewel, fifteen feet behind me, looking straight ahead, steps in a single stride through the window. Still staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in four strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endued with life from the hips down, and steps in a single stride through the opposite window and into the path again just as I come around the corner. In single file and five feet apart and Jewel now in front, we go on up the path toward the foot of the bluff.[7]

Again, all is plainly described, apart from that part of the scene from which Darl himself is physically absent. As soon as Jewel has stepped through the window, he becomes a simile until he re-emerges out of the other window back into simple topographic prose. Again, we must inhabit the cotton-house from which the narrator himself is absent, in order to realise the scene which he cannot see. True, Darl may have witnessed Jewel do this on previous occasions, and it may indeed be his probable aspect and progress through the building, but it can nonetheless only be a projection. The lack of ambiguity in the assertion of fact ("he crosses the floor in four strides") rests uneasily with the need to create the scene through the image of the cigar-store Indian, and the dependence upon the reader to visualise it in Darl's absence. Furthermore, there is no mention here of the "anyone" that could have observed them approaching. Our role in the created textual world, as well as in its creation, continues to be both fundamental and fragile.

If Darl Bundren here has certain similarities to the first-person narrators of *The Sound and the Fury,* then he surely also assumes the narrative powers of a figure like the authorial voice of that novel's fourth section and other third-person Faulkner narratives. Here and elsewhere, he imaginatively describes scenes of which he is not a direct part, assuming the novelist's role in directing our thoughts and reading, while requiring our own contribution to bring things to fruition. The most dramatic example of this is his account of his mother's death: "She lies back and turns her head without so much as glancing at pa. She looks at Vardaman; her eyes, the life in them, rushing suddenly upon them; the two flames glare up for a steady instant. Then they go out as though someone had leaned down and blown upon them."[8] The death is told from the outside, the precise details again made strange by their provider being miles away: the absent Darl seems more intimate with it than those actually present, at least as he tells it. He goes on to describe the family's various responses, while his own unexplained, apparently prescient realisation of Addie's demise is expressed in italicised, othered exchanges with Jewel: "*Jewel, I say, she is dead, Jewel. Addie Bundren is dead.*"[9] Darl is many things, as the novel reveals, but one of his most important roles is as a writer of his family's tale, and his narratives have the nearest to what we might call Faulknerian diction in the novel, notwithstanding their being delivered by a character. But if he is a manifestation of the author figure within the created work, then he also illustrates how untrustworthy such a figure can also be: along with his provision of impossible narratives, Darl obversely withholds information from us at times, such as his own culpability in events. Indeed, if Darl's narratives are at their most revealing when he foregrounds others to the extent of denying his own agency, this is often down to his role as

commentator rather than full participant—though one could argue this makes him the greatest participant of all. When he does act to very great effect, such as burning down Gillespie's barn, he neglects to narrate his own part in this. Darl has more narrative sections than any other character, but we find out more about *him* from what others say, and from what he himself does not tell us.

In the context of Yoknapatawpha, of course, being an unreliable narrator does not really mark him out as unusual—or, at least, it does not make him less reliable than, say, William Faulkner. But if Darl is the most evident and disturbing version of a character's writerly participation in the tale, wilfully creating scenes that need reception to be realised, he is far from the only one. This point in itself undermines his authority, as his narratives are subject to the qualifying accounts of his fellows. While the other narrators in the book do not, insofar as we can tell, have access to Darl's narratives themselves, many of them do offer telling, conflicting accounts of Darl, their author. To Cora Tull, Darl is "the only one of [the Bundrens] that had his mother's nature, had any natural affection," the only one who is genuine in his ministrations to the dying woman.[10] But her husband Vernon notes "them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk,"[11] and for the farmer Samson, Darl is "the one folks talks about."[12] The subtle distinction between these last two remarks actually sums up the situation well: somewhat like Joe Christmas, Darl is both the instigator of "talk" and the subject of it, both creator and created. And again, though Darl may be the most extreme example of this in the novel, everybody else is similarly authorial and authored in a constant and constantly changing way. Each of the many narrators of *As I Lay Dying* affects the overall story in a different way, and each are affected by the others' narrative portrayals of them. Discussing Dewey Dell, Richard Gray suggests that she, "like the other major characters in *As I Lay Dying* . . . exists in the clash of voices, *between* the different consciousnesses that continually debate her. She, and they, offer the revelation that identity is made through activities of speech that can never be terminated or contained."[13] I would posit that the story as a whole is similarly conditional. As in *The Sound and the Fury,* the story somewhere at the heart of this novel is very slight: Addie Bundren dies, and her family transport her body to Jefferson, facing a number of difficulties along the way. This is really about as much as can be said definitely to happen, and even Addie's death is problematised, to say the least, by her having the longest narrative section herself. Every person, event and motive along the way is subject to multiple viewing and telling, each rendering of a situation coloured by the teller's understandings and prejudices, just as the family members themselves are motivated in different ways to make the trip.

Again, this is an overall condition already known to us from reading *The Sound and the Fury,* but there is a paradox in that while time is generally more straightforward in *As I Lay Dying,* in that we can just about trace a linear trajectory through the novel, the sections themselves do not work in such a sequential way. This dynamic of the form and content being apparently at odds is important: as R. Rio-Jelliffe notes, "while some segments progress chronologically, recurrent temporal concordances and spatial dislocations fracture the journey framework. . . . The fifty-nine variations on events around Addie Bundren's death, told by fifteen narrators, strain the idea of structure in *As I Lay Dying.*"[14] In *The Sound and the Fury,* Jason's realisation, for instance, is dependent upon Benjy and Quentin's sections before him to work, the individual narratives' complexity placed within a comparatively clear overall structure. In this novel there is a greater structural chaos throughout, as individual voices clash and comment and effect each other in advance and retrospectively throughout. But, as in the earlier novel, such chaos as there is is deliberately and meticulously constructed, through the placement of its components. As readers, we do not face a task as initially daunting as, say, creating Benjy Compson, but we are constantly required to realise the plural environment of Yoknapatawpha, a place that seems, if anything, even more fluid and conditional here, due to the sheer rapidity of the turnover of voices. As Gray notes, "the entire structure of *As I Lay Dying* is restlessly dialectical, involving a continual and rapid movement between character as object and character as subject."[15] The essentially Bakhtinian basis for this understanding of the novel's operations is entirely appropriate: the voices clashing and weaving their way through each other and through the book manifest the creative, dialogic interplay between stratified languages—heteroglossia—that Bakhtin identifies. Furthermore, they relate clearly to the similar creative exchanges and relationships between the component books of the Yoknapatawpha series as a whole.

When Darl says that "anyone watching us . . . can see," he speaks the most revealing truth about the Bundrens' condition and about the novel's democratic mode of regarding them. Notwithstanding the very private nature of many of the narratives, the family's journey through Yoknapatawpha, and briefly beyond, makes them very public property, their carnivalesque affront to society forcing mutual involvement.[16] Though the bulk of the narratives come from the Bundrens themselves, the pharmacist Moseley's is just one of several sections of *As I Lay Dying* delivered by more or less interested onlookers, some of whom take part in the action and its telling for extended periods, others having only a single narrative. Vernon and Cora Tull, Peabody, Whitfield, Samson, Armstid and others all contribute to

another Faulknerian chorus, similar to that in *The Hamlet*—albeit more scattered—and even containing some of the same characters. Some of these figures, like Moseley, offer reasonably straightforward versions of the strange episodes they witness. In some ways Samson's narrative, for instance, is the plain, self-confessedly bemused account of an ordinary man appalled at what he sees. And in some ways his reading quandaries are similar to ours, with regard to the Bundrens, and his opinions on their journey are coloured by his own lacks and standpoints, just as ours are. As such, just as there are character-narrators like Darl and Dewey Dell who take on roles analogous to the writer and reader of *As I Lay Dying,* or of *The Sound and the Fury* or *Absalom, Absalom!,* so there are some whose feelings of horror, amazement and grim humour, and whose inevitable part in the drama, may be comparable to ours in a book like *Sanctuary.*

Much the most frequent of these is Vernon Tull, calm husband of the sanctimonious Cora and a regular at the Bundren house, who accompanies them for the first part of the journey to Jefferson. As a relative outsider (though not from outside Yoknapatawpha, unlike Moseley) with significant narrative and personal interest in what goes on, he might be likened to V. K. Ratliff in the Snopes trilogy: like him, Tull is a generally likeable, sensible chap who regards his objects of view with a mixture of cautious respect and bemusement. Unwilling to condemn Anse, as his wife does in no uncertain terms, he is nevertheless concerned about the general preposterousness of the plan to transport Addie's decaying corpse to Jefferson when there is a perfectly serviceable cemetery much closer in New Hope. But he is respectful of Anse's promise to Addie, and tentatively supports the quest at least up to the point where the raging river takes it beyond foolhardiness to potential suicide. Tull is probably the most liberal and generous of the readers within the text: he has no particular agenda to pursue—unlike virtually every other character/narrator, Bundren or otherwise—and even when he does offer a view, whether on the Bundrens or his own wife, he seems at pains diplomatically to acknowledge those of others. At times, this gentle perceptiveness leads to some feelings of mild exasperation at those more judgmental. For instance, when discussing the incident at the river, after the fact, he suggests to Cora that her position on Anse is a tad quixotic: "'I don't know what you want, then,' I said. 'One breath you say they was daring the hand of God to try it, and the next breath you jump on Anse because he wasn't with them.'" Cora's response to this (as reported by Tull) is indicative of her attitude and of her differences as a reader from her husband: she silently ends the debate, "with that singing look in her face like she had done give up folks and all their foolishness and had done went on ahead of them, marching up the sky,

singing."[17] While she is a comic and largely ineffectual character, Cora Tull is arguably one of the most marvellously infuriating characters in Faulkner's work, her self-righteousness tolerable only because she does not carry on forward into horrific action after the fashion of other figures convinced of their own moral rectitude, such as *Light in August*'s Doc Hines. Like Hines, however, Cora rails against the evils of others by enlisting her God to her cause and claiming that she is speaking God's own truth. Her close-mindedness does not result in death and destruction, but her simple refusal to sanction any further discussion once she feels she has made her unassailable point serves makes her a comic version of Faulkner's more dangerous religious fanatics. She works, perhaps, as an example of a reader exercising the kind of absolute power towards the text (the Bundrens) envisioned by Stanley E. Fish, but with no willingness actively to participate in an interpretive community.[18] The glorious comic irony of this is that, as the character most insistent upon the correctness of her reading, she is the one most demonstrably wrong in her assessments—insofar as one can say this at all in this novel. Indeed, this is a sizeable qualification, for errant though Cora's readings may seem we cannot absolutely say that they are false as there is no absolute truth to refer to, only the subjective, clashing voices of other characters. That this infinitely multiple state of narrative possibility itself runs counter to Cora's pronouncements of singular truth only complicates the matter further. We might say that Vernon and Cora Tull represent two opposing extremes in *As I Lay Dying*'s internal readership: one is an interpretive democrat, open and accommodating, allowing all or most possibilities their due but almost to the point of having no view at all, the other an absolutist imposing her own world-view on proceedings and refusing to accept any deviation. Vernon's readings effectively nullify him, whereas Cora's nullify everything that is not her.

While the chief purpose of these characters is to comment on events, they do so not just as individual voices but as a verbal community who interact, whether consciously or otherwise, with each other as well as with the Bundren family. Indeed, they do not just provide social context, but register the Bundrens inextricably as part of the internal fabric of Yoknapatawpha even as their peculiar journey makes them strange. Furthermore, this occurs in ways that continually bring Faulkner's reader into that society as well, as it is we who must read the signs, register the links, realise the unspoken narratives that underlie the more overt words on the page. An example of this is in the unspoken, indeed unknown relationship between Vernon Tull and the allegedly Reverend Whitfield. In the aftermath of Addie's death, but before the journey has begun, the Tulls are at the Bundren house when Whitfield

arrives, offering the Lord's grace on the house, and the washed-away bridge as excuse for his lateness. The episode appears to be a funeral of sorts, and Tull gives his impressions:

> The song ends; the voices quaver away with a rich and dying fall. Whitfield begins. His voice is bigger than him. It's like they are not the same. It's like he is one, and his voice is one, swimming on two horses side-by-side across the ford and coming into the house, the mud-splashed one and the one that never even got wet, triumphant and sad.[19]

It is probable that Tull has no real inkling of how insightful these words are; certainly the first-time reader of the novel has no way of knowing, at this point, just how much smaller than his voice Whitfield really is. Tull does recognise that Whitfield's speech is somehow insincere, or at least tangential, its doctrine of triumphant sadness apparently at some remove from the bedraggled figure before them. We do not know if this is Tull's habitual reckoning of Whitfield, or indeed of men of the cloth in general; we do know him to be less in thrall to what others tell him is the will of God than his wife is, for instance. In any case, at this point in the novel it seems as though, at worst, the Bundrens are getting an unfeeling, detached sermon. Of course, this still figures Whitfield as a liar, presenting an untrue version of himself.

With Whitfield's own narrative later in the book, we get rather more insight into just how much words are being used to disguise truth. From his own narrative it would appear that Whitfield was not on his way to deliver a funereal oration at all, but to confess his affair with Addie, and his paternity of Jewel, to Anse. In the past tense, Whitfield delivers his tale in terms of an epic quest to "confess [his] sin aloud" to the wronged husband, against Satan's rigours and God's test of a raging flood—a professed desire to make public his moral failure.[20] However, upon hearing that Addie has already died, and that there was no danger of her revealing the transgression herself, he instead gives his now rather futile blessing on the bereaved house, his private conscience assuaged by a God strangely malleable on issues of sin and confession:

> I have sinned, O Lord. Thou knowest the extent of my remorse and the will of my spirit. But He is merciful; He will accept the will for the deed, Who knew that when I framed the words of my confession it was to Anse I spoke them, even though he was not there. It was He in His infinite wisdom that restrained the tale from her dying lips as she lay

> surrounded by those who loved and trusted her; mine the travail by water which I sustained by the strength of His hand. Praise to Thee in Thy bounteous and omnipotent love; O praise.[21]

Whitfield does not just lie to the Bundrens, but to himself, to us (even if we are not recognised), and, for what it is worth, his God—an entity clearly being summoned up out of Whitfield's needs of the moment. A magnificently realised comic sketch, Whitfield's narrative tells the opposite tale to the one it purports to: even his stated desire to confess is motivated by a fear that Addie will reveal the truth first. In a truer sense than Tull knew, Whitfield's words are indeed separate from him, and like Uncle Hubert in "The Bear" he uses them in place of deeds. Indeed, Whitfield works as a literal example of Addie's theory of the incompatibility of words and truth, "that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at."[22]

Of course, the reader must discern the various narratives that accompany the one that Whitfield chooses to narrate, to note that he is effectively saying the opposite of what he says, and to put into play the dialogue between the story he tells and stories he does not. Furthermore, when reading *As I Lay Dying* a second or subsequent time, our response to that earlier observation of Tull's might be somewhat different. What seemed like a mildly cynical dismissal of the priest's performance now takes on rather greater resonance; our advance retrospection, to follow Iser again, adding further to our understanding of Whitfield, and probably increasing our appreciation of Tull's own perceptiveness. A dynamic dialogic web forms between these two characters as we apply our knowledge of and from one voice to the proclamations of another, and all this further increases the interpretive environment through which the Bundrens move as well as involving the novel's reader ever more intrinsically.

In this way, the relationships between the individual sections of *As I Lay Dying,* and in particular the reader's responsibility in bringing these relationships to life, has clear parallels with the books of the Yoknapatawpha series as a whole, which situation will be discussed in my concluding chapter. Each narrative can be considered on its own terms, and very richly at that, but each gains immeasurably from its place in the greater whole, which itself would be the lesser for any narrative's absence. Through this mass of interpretive possibility, we can trace the story at hand—or rather, we can trace a version of it—while simultaneously creating the world in which it takes place; at micro- and macrocosmic levels, this goes for the Bundrens' story, and Yoknapatawpha's. That this novel actively uses this

principle so powerfully makes it one of Faulkner's most powerful texts; it also renders it a paradigm text of Yoknapatawpha. As Joe Christmas realises himself to be the product of a linguistic democracy in *Light in August,* so *As I Lay Dying* is a text resounding with interpretive multiplicity, with all the creative freedom and instability this brings.

Chapter Twelve

The Loom and the Rug: The Making of a World

Among many astonishing things about the novel that may well be Faulkner's finest, *Absalom, Absalom!,* the pen-and-ink map of Yoknapatawpha County that appears in its covers is one of the most entertaining and, perhaps, surprising. There is, of course, much enjoyment to be gained from finding the sites of one's favourite episodes from the novels, helpfully illustrated by pithy descriptions such as "Varner's store, where Flem Snopes got his start," and placing them in the cartographic context of their fictional environment.[1] But while the map does frequently serve this largely superfluous purpose, it nonetheless suggests, or reminds us of, a number of issues that are fascinating but often problematic, especially with regard to the more directly literary construction of the county it charts. The most obvious of these is the insertion of the famous claim "William Faulkner, Sole Owner & Proprietor," an assertion that the evidence of the novels themselves shows to be, at a fundamental level, without foundation. This is particularly true, we might say, in the case of the very book to which the map is attached, for *Absalom, Absalom!* more than any other belies any claims to singular authority over the construction of Yoknapatawpha. As I have discussed in relation to several particular texts and characters, the fictional world can in no way be attributed to the endeavours of any one person, even the man whose name appears on the spines of the books that constitute the series: *The Sound and the Fury,* to take just the most overt example, stands as evidence that the readers of the novels are at least as important in realising the text, the work, as the author. Furthermore, *Absalom, Absalom!* itself is testament to the extreme degree to which these interactive relationships penetrate and construct the world within the fiction as well, to the extent that clear distinctions between "world" and "work" can no longer be made with any great validity. Again,

this is only the most obvious example of this phenomenon, and I hope to have shown how we can see it throughout the series as a whole.

Turning this around, however, the map does serve as an indication of the scale of Faulkner's own particular design for Yoknapatawpha, a fact that is not undermined by our writerly objections to his claim. While we might, if feeling uncharitable, balk at the apparent attempt to transcribe the myriad possibilities of the novels into a neat single sheet of paper, the map reminds us that none of these novels should be considered in isolation, that the "courthouse where Temple Drake testified" is part of the same world as the "fishing camp where Wash Jones killed Sutpen, later bought and restored by Major Cassius de Spain"—*Sanctuary, Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses,* for instance, are individual parts of Faulkner's overall vision of a much wider project. This is evinced yet further by the insertion of details that had not yet appeared in the published fiction by the time of the map's appearance in 1936: Faulkner's own approach to Yoknapatawpha is long-term and wide-ranging, and the county clearly exists beyond the confines of any particular book as much for him as it surely has to for us. This matter is made yet more problematic by the inconsistencies we can discern when applying the map to the novels, inconsistencies that are evident in the books themselves as well: the reference to Flem's "unloading" of the Old Frenchman place on "Suratt," a figure who by the time this story appears in *The Hamlet* has been renamed "Ratliff," not to mention the placing of Suratt/Ratliff's home near to Frenchman's Bend when the evidence of the Snopes trilogy suggests that he lives in Jefferson. This, of course, is nit-picking, and it is not my intention to present a list of Faulkner's "mistakes:" this has been done before at great length, and is, really, of only trivial interest in itself.[2] However, the matter does throw up important issues of the varying relationships between writer, material and reader, and the degree to which we might view consistency as important in the construction of Yoknapatawpha as a whole. This map, then, suggesting certainty while placed incongruously in Faulkner's least "certain" text and containing easily identifiable errors, and claiming a wholly indefensible sole ownership of the fictional landscape while still serving to indicate the magnitude of the author's intentions, has an interest that goes far beyond the merely enjoyable. The problems it throws up invalidate neither it nor the novels, but act as a useful and far from unfamiliar entrance into the exploration of Yoknapatawpha County's overall creation.

Within the text of *Absalom, Absalom!* itself, Mr. Compson gives voice to Judith Sutpen's tortured awareness of the importance of making a mark in the world as she gives Charles Bon's letter to Quentin's grandmother:

> As you like. Read it if you like or dont read it if you like. Because you make so little impression, you see. You get born and you try this and you dont know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they dont know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it cant matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it provided there was someone to remember to have the marble scratched and set up or had time to, and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they dont even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell, and it doesn't matter. And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something—a scrap of paper—something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that *was* once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone cant be *is* because it never can become *was* because it cant ever die or perish . . . [3]

I quote this passage at length because it provides an extraordinarily illustrative account of the processes that go into Yoknapatawpha's construction, as well as being a highly moving account of living with and in those processes. On the face of things, Judith is expressing a classic case of existential angst, trying vainly to make some impression in a world that apparently seeks to deny her, but in doing so she identifies the conflicting forces that co-create that very world itself. Her object here is life, but this can be translated, with reference to the particular portrayal of life at issue in William Faulkner's novels, into an analysis or realisation of the complex construction of the world of Yoknapatawpha. Judith's recognition of the difficulty of individual existence in such a collectively creative environment as life also takes in the nature of that environment itself, and identifies, in essence, the very complex of readers and writers that I have been examining during the course of this book. In

coming finally to consider the construction of Yoknapatawpha across the series as a whole, Judith's images of the Ones, the loom, the weavers and the rug are highly applicable.

In this final chapter, I shall consider the connotations of many of the processes of reading and writing examined with relation to particular texts or figures in previous chapters on a county-wide level, placing these processes in context with each other. My aim, ultimately, is to arrive at an understanding of what Yoknapatawpha itself can be considered to be, how it exists, and what its relevance to the broader, "real" world might be. As already suggested, there are numerous ways in which the construction of individual lives and circumstances within individual works can be seen as analogous to or even synonymous with the construction of those fictional works themselves, and the consequences of this has far-reaching implications for our engagement with life and fiction's role within life. Here, in considering the broader fictional picture, I hope to explore these possibilities to the extent that I believe Faulkner makes not only possible but desirable.

It is not difficult to imagine the many figures I have variously identified as readers, writers, or both, in the position Judith Sutpen identifies as struggling to weave their individual patterns into the rug of Yoknapatawpha. Such figures as John Sartoris, Thomas Sutpen and Flem Snopes actively attempt to write their way into the fabric of their environment through their travails, working with Southern archetypes, trying to establish, imitate or appropriate them to their own ends. Similarly, figures we might readily identify as readers such as the two Bayards Sartoris, Quentin Compson, Gavin Stevens and V. K. Ratliff, in their obsessive drives to interpret and understand their forebears and contemporaries, and the society and history with which they must live, contribute their cognitive imprint to Yoknapatawpha in ways that are no less creative. As we have seen, it is in the interaction between such writer and reader figures that the very stuff of Yoknapatawpha can be said to exist within the fiction. Up to this point, I have examined these characters largely in terms of the novels in which they appear most prominently, considering the collaborative efforts of, for instance, Quentin and Sutpen, Ratliff and Flem in constructing the particular facets of the county's existence to which they most obviously and directly apply themselves. But before considering some of the numerous other characters within the series that might be seen as operating in comparable ways, it is worth examining instances in which some of these particular figures appear or are invoked at other stages, as a further indicator of just how intertextual our attitude must surely be.

Colonel John Sartoris, for instance, as well as forming the psychological centrepiece of *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished,* crops up on numerous

occasions outside the immediate family drama with which we most closely associate him. In my discussion of Sutpen's rise in Yoknapatawpha society in Chapter Four, I have pointed to his usurpation of Sartoris's command of a Civil War regiment to demonstrate Sutpen's overthrowing of the traditional elite by playing and beating them at their own game. In that instance, the tenor of the portrayal is largely on Sartoris's own terms: even as he is being demoted in the county's roll of honour, it is very much in terms of his heroism, his position as a Southern champion. Alongside his appearances in several other novels and stories, however, a rather different portrayal occurs in *Light in August,* wherein a tale by now familiar to us is viewed from another angle altogether. During her relaying of her family history to Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden tells of how her ancestor, Calvin Jr., "had just turned twenty when he was killed in the town two miles away by an ex-slaveholder and Confederate soldier named Sartoris, over a question of Negro voting."[4] Whereas Sartoris has elsewhere been seen by commentators within the series as a local hero, albeit one whose brand of heroism becomes more and more open to question, here we gain an entirely different perspective. Joanna continues:

> They hated us here. We were Yankees. Foreigners. Worse than foreigners: enemies. Carpetbaggers. And it—the War—still too close for even the ones that got whipped to be very sensible. Stirring up the negroes to murder and rape, they called it. Threatening white supremacy. So I suppose that Colonel Sartoris was a town hero because he killed with two shots from the same pistol an old onearmed man and a boy who had never even cast his first vote. Maybe they were right. I dont know.[5]

Joanna is probably right in her supposition: this is exactly the kind of thing for which Sartoris is feted within Yoknapatawpha. But with this telling of the tale, his actions seem sordid and cowardly rather than heroic. Events that we have seen before are turned entirely on their head, and the champion of Southern honour is turned into a petty racist who murders the comparatively defenceless for holding different views. This transformation is further developed into narrative deflation when Joe asks Joanna "why your father never killed that fellow—what's his name? Sartoris."[6] Having been reduced to a disreputable bit-player in the drama in Joanna's telling, Sartoris is now rendered forgettable. After the torment caused by his example and name in other texts, he is now no more than a "fellow" among innumerable others, just the particular one with the gun. In answer, Joanna reasons that her father was "enough French to respect anybody's love for the land where he

and his people were born and to understand that a man would have to act as the land where he was born had trained him to act."[7] Such a comment is laden with meaning in the context of the novel in which it appears, of course, but suffice to say here that Sartoris himself is ultimately negated, pictured as no more than an automaton with no individual will at all. The mighty have not so much fallen as evaporated.

Thomas Sutpen, likewise, reappears from time to time to varying effect, further adding to the impressions of him gained from *Absalom, Absalom!* Along with Sartoris and other Yoknapatawpha notables he features in the grand Civil War narrative included in *Requiem for a Nun,* but perhaps the most interesting treatment of him outside *Absalom, Absalom!* comes in "An Odor of Verbena," the final part of *The Unvanquished.* After the intense narrative attention and construction Sutpen has received in Faulkner's previous published novel, Bayard Sartoris here gives us a one-page synopsis of part of Sutpen's tale as he sees it:

> He had been Father's second-in-command in the first regiment and had been elected colonel when the regiment deposed Father after Second Manassas, and it was Sutpen and not the regiment whom Father never forgave. He was underbred, a cold ruthless man who had come into the country about thirty years before the War, nobody knew from where except Father said you could look at him and know he would not dare to tell. He had got some land and nobody knew how he did that either . . . and built a big house and married and set up as a gentleman.[8]

To the reader emerging from the Sutpen experience in *Absalom, Absalom!* this might seem almost insultingly simplistic. But, as with the treatment of Sartoris in *Light in August,* it is just as valid a view of Sutpen as any of those in the earlier novel. Again, the figure we are accustomed to thinking of as central becomes an incidental character, a figure who is almost bound to be presented in an unfavourable light in view of who is telling the tale—we might note, also, that Sartoris is at least partially restored to heroic status here, notwithstanding Bayard's troubles as discussed in Chapter Six. The narrative reappearance and transformation of both these characters in these and other instances is an indicator both of how intertextual their creation is in terms of Faulkner's novels, and of how malleable their presence and legacy is as they impact upon the differing characters and scenarios throughout the series. If they refuse to be pinned down within the texts in which they feature most strongly, this principle is extended indefinitely when applied to the series as a whole.

Similarly, some of the figures who act as the major players in *The Sound and the Fury* feature in other novels, freed from the dominating power they have in that book. The encyclopaedic sweep of Compson history that constitutes Faulkner's "Appendix," already discussed in Chapter One, is an example of their centuries-long participation in the local scene, but this is also taken through into dramas in which they are not the central focus. *The Mansion,* for instance, provides a late (in publishing terms) return to their saga, introducing a potted history of events we have already seen with the revelation that

> Flem Snopes now owned what was left of the Compson place. Which wasn't much. The tale was they had sold a good part of it off back in 1909 for the municipal golf course in order to send the oldest son, Quentin, to Harvard, where he committed suicide at the end of his freshman year; and about ten years ago the youngest son, Benjy, the idiot, had set himself and the house both on fire and burned up in it.[9]

This almost casual mention of Benjy's death and the destruction of the Compson house in the course of summarising crucial parts of *The Sound and the Fury*'s story is deeply shocking, primarily because of its departure from the intense interiority of his portrayal in that novel. The reader having effectively become the character in the first section of the earlier book, to have his ultimate demise so dismissed as an incidental curiosity is disconcerting, to say the least. The authorial voice goes on to take the bleakly comic elements of Jason's section in *The Sound and the Fury* to present him as a pathetic last bastion of one of Jefferson's founding families in the fight against Snopesism. We are told that "Jason Compson was undergoing an anguish which he probably believed not only no human should suffer, but no human could really bear. . . . [His] lost patrimony was already being chopped up into a subdivision of standardised Veteran's Housing matchboxes . . ."[10] Rather more, perhaps, than the Appendix, this late, brief return to the fall of the house of Compson serves to contextualise this particular family crisis in twentieth-century Yoknapatawpha history. As well as being yet another marker in Flem's domination, the "anguish" Jason undergoes is instantly, laughably recognisable from *The Sound and the Fury,* and shown for the larger irrelevance it has now become. Just as the old estate has been lost to the march of modernity, so has the importance of what it once symbolised, other than as a footnote in Southern history. Once again, what we have elsewhere thought of as a major component is here sidelined; crucially, it is this very marginalisation in narrative terms that speaks volumes about the ongoing life of Yoknapatawpha, as well as implying the vital interactivity of individual stories in the collective history.

As well as these reappearances of such major characters in lesser roles at various points in Yoknapatawpha's narrative representation, there is a huge cast of apparently minor characters who crop up again and again throughout the series. An indication of their role can be seen in the incessant "chorus" of *The Hamlet,* sitting on the porch of Varner's store and commenting upon the actions and apparent motivations of the major players. What becomes clear is that the role of this chorus is every bit as important as that of, say, Flem Snopes or Will Varner, their world of talk largely constituting the psychological framework of Frenchman's Bend. Such talkers, however, appear frequently throughout the series, especially in those novels more structurally dominated by outright speech. *As I Lay Dying,* for instance, as well as featuring the voices of the Bundren family themselves, is partially made up of a chorus of observers of their odyssey, figures such as Vernon and Cora Tull, Dr. Peabody and Moseley. Not only does the interaction of such commentators with the action and each other constitute much of that particular novel's own narrative power, it also contextualises their own appearances in other novels, in different roles. The Tulls, for instance, are the family whose telephone Ruby uses to report Tommy's death in *Sanctuary:* they are hardly mentioned themselves in that novel, but their role in *As I Lay Dying* allows for a much richer picture of their reactions to such revelations as they try to eat their Sunday dinner. Peabody, similarly, has previously featured as a somewhat comic character in *Sartoris,* an appearance that makes his minor part in *As I Lay Dying* all the more humorous and desperate.

These, then, are just some of the many characters who try to weave their own patterns into the Yoknapatawpha rug. As we have seen in previous chapters, some of them work with bold patterns, attempting to force their identities indelibly upon the landscape and psychology of the county. Others operate more quietly, without apparent design or intent, merely trying to live their lives according to the codes and circumstances with which they are faced and, of course, contribute to. We see this from novel to novel, but also crucially across the novelistic terrain. It is not difficult to liken this image of weavers on a loom to Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, and, indeed, to identify similar processes going on in the construction of Yoknapatawpha within the fiction, as can be seen in the complex creation of Joe Christmas. The vast range of influences that come together in the comparatively microcosmic Christmas chronotope are similarly at play in the ongoing building of the environment in which he lives, and the tendencies that Bakhtin sees as fundamental to novelistic discourse are, if anything, even more imperative and inherent when considering how the elements of the individual novels relate and interact with each other to bring about a common world.

Following on from this, we can take the ramifications of Bakhtin's chronotope, dramatically personified in an exemplary figure such as Joe Christmas, and broaden this out to apply to whole novels within the series. If Joe, as a chronotope, acts as "the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied," and "emerges as a center for concretizing representation," then surely the same can be said of the novel in which he appears, or, indeed, of any other novel in the series.[11] John Sartoris, as we have seen, "lives" throughout the mental framework of Yoknapatawpha, featuring again and again in its history and self-image. *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished* are where the voices that constitute his existence come together most notably: whereas he serves as a prominent chronotope within these books, the books themselves act as chronotopic means by which his series-wide potential can be realised. Much the same can be said for any one of Faulkner's characters: in turning Bakhtin's terms around, we can see the individual novels as places in which the myriad voices of Yoknapatawpha meet and mingle in one form or another. If, in my adaptation of Bakhtin's model, a character serves to bring a novel to life by concentrating its voices and meanings, then the same must surely be true conversely of the novels when applied to that character's life in Yoknapatawpha as a whole.

To bring all this into play, the responsibilities of the writer and the reader in relation to various novels up to this point must figure at every level of narrative possibility. If these characters can be said to live in an environment somehow beyond the confines of component novels, then we must consider the "spaces" and "gaps," in Iser's terms, that I have previously discussed, but at a county-wide level.[12] Just as, for instance, Benjy and his world are created in the interaction between Faulkner's manipulation of textual elements and the reader's engagement with them in *The Sound and the Fury,* so must these elements work to construct Yoknapatawpha in the wealth of possibilities between the books. In weighing up the varying portraits of a Sutpen or a Sartoris between *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished,* or *Sartoris* and *Light in August,* for instance, we are dealing with a delicate relationship between Faulkner's use of their lives and actions at different points and the ability of the reader to organise these elements into some kind of order, with all the necessary degree of subjective interpretation that this entails. If the population of Yoknapatawpha are the mutually involved and conflicting weavers of the patterns in the rug, then we might look at Faulkner and ourselves as the "Ones that set up the loom."

Just as we have seen Faulkner's crucial role in enabling the reader to operate in a writerly fashion in such texts as *The Sound and the Fury* and, in a different way, *Sanctuary,* so we might look at his treatment of characters,

events and motivations across the series in a similar fashion. With respect to this relationship, I have examined these two novels in detail because they strike me as representing two extremes of Faulkner's structural artistry, but we must bear in mind that no two Yoknapatawpha books are written in the same way. Faulkner has spread the stuff of this apocryphal world across fourteen novels (if we accept Faulkner's understanding of *Go Down, Moses* as a novel rather than a collection of short stories), as well as a large number of stories, and the effect of each one is subtly different. As well as the approaches already considered we might also, for instance, look at the folksy reminiscence of *The Reivers,* a comic, nostalgic tall tale told by an old man about a childhood adventure, prominently featuring Boon Hogganbeck, who also featured as a rather more darkly comic element in "The Bear," in *Go Down, Moses. Requiem for a Nun* is a product of Faulkner playing the role of writer-as-God, combining epic, almost biblical accounts of Yoknapatawpha's history, featuring just about every major character we meet in other books, with a sequel to *Sanctuary* presented in play-script form. Of these two elements, the former is by far the more satisfying, despite the prose being reminiscent of the "Appendix" to *The Sound and the Fury,* with the feeling of closure that that implies. With both these approaches, however, we can discern an attempt to present something like a definitive account either of the entirety of Yoknapatawpha history or of a small tale within it. The prose sections attempt such inclusivity, and are presented in such a grand style, that one comes to it very much in the manner of a congregation to a preacher's sermon. In the dramatic sections, notwithstanding the relative failure of the drama itself, we see Faulkner literally directing his characters with stage directions and scripted lines.

My aim, however, is not to point to the relative successes or failures of particular novels, but to consider their interaction as component parts of the Yoknapatawpha series. This, of course, cannot be achieved without bearing in mind the reader's contribution to and relationship with the collective material. To an extent, our engagement with Faulkner's use of elements as seen in *The Sound and the Fury* is possibly the best way of approaching this. Just as we are required to apply our own conceptions of order or normality to the strange narratives that constitute that novel, and to exercise what Iser calls "advance retrospection" with regard to narrative elements as the sections progress, so we can see a similar requirement when we consider the series as a whole.[13] The comic look of shock that we might imagine on the faces of the Tull family in *Sanctuary,* for instance, will be a product of our placing our knowledge of the horror that has occurred at the Old Frenchman place in the context of our impressions of the Tulls gained from *As I*

Lay Dying; just as those very impressions were produced from the dynamics between their sections in that book, themselves formed in our relation to the material that Faulkner puts forward. Similarly, the picture of John Sartoris that we get from *Light in August* may be a vivid one in itself, but it gains immeasurably from the reader's ability to place this in the context of his portrayal in *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished.* Faulkner, of course, very deliberately places these individual insights into Sartoris's life and meaning in different novels, but without the reader's cognitive involvement in juxtaposing, merging and considering the connotations of each, the fuller picture cannot emerge. In reading *Light in August,* therefore, we are inevitably rereading *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished,* as well every other instance in which Sartoris appears.

The most extreme example of this is in the prominent role of Quentin Compson, and to a lesser extent his father, in both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Beyond the common element of Quentin's going to Harvard, the two novels do not make much explicit reference to one another, despite this crucial link: Caddy, Jason, and Benjy, for instance, do not feature in *Absalom, Absalom!,* and Sutpen is apparently absent from Quentin's narrative in *The Sound and the Fury.* It is up to the reader to bring the unbearable weight of Quentin's personal torment as seen in the earlier book to his role in the later, and we contextualise his presence at Harvard in *Absalom, Absalom!* with our knowledge of the measures taken to send him there in *The Sound and the Fury.* Furthermore, our understanding of Quentin's tortuous relation to the codes and mores of his homeland that will ultimately result in his suicide adds even greater power to his own reading, rereading and writing of Sutpen's tale. This situation works the other way as well: on reading *Absalom, Absalom!* our insight into Quentin's last day in *The Sound and the Fury* is greatly deepened. As such, the character of Quentin Compson, as well as being partially the product of our engagement with the complex operations of both these novels, comes into far richer being when we apply them to each other. Quentin, in his greatest potential, lives in neither of these books *per se,* but in the connections we make between them. I have previously alluded to the analogous natures of the reader's construction of character in *The Sound and the Fury* and Quentin's in *Absalom, Absalom!,* but as a further indicator of the intricacy of the intertextuality involved we might consider another, easily overlooked element that requires the reader's sensitive involvement to be realised. In *Absalom, Absalom!,* Shreve interrupts Quentin's telling of how he and his father came across the Sutpen family graves to ask about "the nigger on the mule? Luster."[14] This character is something of an enigma. We remember Benjy's minder of the same name in *The Sound and the Fury,* but

this cannot be the same Luster, as he is a boy, or a young man at most, in 1928, the narrative present for Benjy's narrative, and Shreve is talking about events before *his* present of 1910. What is more, Quentin refers to no Luster in his section of the earlier book, and thus the alert reader has a mystery on his or her hands as to the identity of this other Luster. Remembering that the Luster we know of is of unidentified paternity—we know his mother Frony, but no more than that—the logical conclusion we might come to would be that this new Luster is the father of the character in *The Sound and the Fury.* This little scenario plays no real part in the fabric of either story, but such delicate interplay between the two novels adds greatly to their common atmosphere and, more importantly, reminds us again of the importance of the reader-material relationship. For in carrying out this piece of logical deduction using evidence from both novels, prompted by the mention in *Absalom, Absalom!,* we find ourselves, again, doing what Quentin is doing in that novel: forming possible but far from definite conclusions, possible truths, just as we are required to do in *The Sound and the Fury.* It is in small, fragile details such as this, and the reader's fundamental role in realising them, that the characters and the world in which they live come to life, both within and outside their immediate novelistic place.[15]

In much the same way as applied to my study of *Absalom, Absalom!* in Chapter Seven, this world is recognisable as the "virtual" dimension identified by Iser in the "convergence between text and reader,"[16] a convergence suggested by the raw materials of the text but dynamically "set in motion"[17] by the reader's decisions "as to how the gap[s in the text are] to be filled."[18] "By making his decision," Iser notes, the reader "implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text; at the same time it is this inexhaustibility that forces him to make his decision."[19] In Faulkner, these gaps, the inexhaustible world created by the actions I have examined has a name: Yoknapatawpha County.

So, could the "Ones," Faulkner and his readers, have "arranged things a little better?" How well realised is Yoknapatawpha as a literary construct, a virtual dimension in which the weavers can work? On the one hand, to ask whether it might be qualitatively improved if the novels were somehow different, we might just as well enquire as to the length of a piece of string, or whether blue would be better if it were green. However, the notion does suggest important questions about the possibilities surrounding the individual roles of both writer and reader, out of which we may well ponder the effectiveness of Yoknapatawpha as it seems to occur. An obvious factor here is the matter of the various previously noted inconsistencies between some of the novels: inconsistencies of chronology, place, event and character. In his introductory

note to *The Mansion,* Faulkner reasons that these will inevitably occur because his work is a "living literature, and . . . 'living' is motion, and 'motion' is change and alteration and therefore the only alternative to motion is un-motion, stasis, death . . ."[20] In a letter written around the same time, he points out that "the essential truth of these people and their doings, is the thing; the facts are not too important."[21] This is all very well, we might say, and is an eloquent way of side-stepping laborious editorial work on a lifetime's writing, but is it really good enough? Does Yoknapatawpha not suffer, for instance, from *Intruder in the Dust* and *The Town* suggesting two different birth-years for Charles Mallison, nine years apart? This, essentially, is probably down to the disposition of individual readers, the majority of whom are unlikely to notice details such as this, particularly in view of the vast number of details inherent in a several-hundred-year saga evoked through a multi-volume body of work.[22] It might be a more pressing problem in the case of striking differences in character-portrayal: Henry Armstid, for instance, comes across as a well-meaning, stoical figure who does the best he can to help Lena Grove in *Light in August,* whereas he is an obsessed, selfish money-grabber apparently driven mad by greed in the Snopes trilogy. Would this not count as a serious discrepancy in "the essential truth of these people and their doings," and not just a case of mislaid, essentially trivial "facts"? Given that the Yoknapatawpha saga is principally one of *people,* is it not reasonable to expect Faulkner's conception of these people to display rather more consistency than this would suggest, and is not the very validity of the fictional world thereby undermined?

Possibly. On the other hand, where, within the fiction itself, *do* we see consistency of perception, of the reading and writing of characters and events? The very fabric of many of these novels is based on the *lack* of certainty inherent in trying to understand the people, history and environment at hand. The characters I have examined in the course of this book live at their fullest in the very inexhaustibility of interpretative creation. Furthermore, the perceptions of them change and clash from novel to novel, as noted above, and we cannot pin somebody like Sutpen down to any one model. In this context, we might remember that William Faulkner himself is a reader as well, and his readership of the people of Yoknapatawpha is necessarily as contingent and open to alteration and development as anyone else's. In the note in *The Mansion,* Faulkner talks of "knowing" and "living" with the characters: surely we cannot expect that knowledge and life to remain "static," to essentially "die?" The inexhaustibility of the virtual dimension that is Yoknapatawpha must partake of the gaps between the material and Faulkner himself as much as every other figure involved.

This is all part of the point that Yoknapatawpha is primarily a *mental* entity, a collective state of mind—or, rather, a convergence of the states of innumerable minds. This is, of course, quite literally the case, as one will find no "actual," physical Yoknapatawpha County on a map of Mississippi. As has been very well documented, Faulkner uses his native Lafayette County as the basis for his apocrypha, and the town of Jefferson is generally understood to be modelled largely upon his home town, Oxford.[23] Likewise, it is rather a truism to note that he is clearly fascinated and deeply concerned with the history, culture, politics and codes of his native region, and that his anguish over and interrogation of such issues as Southern race relations and sexual mores are largely a product of his living with and in them. These points must, therefore, beg the questions: why does Faulkner not set his novels in the "actual" world in which he lived, rather than a fictive environment modelled upon it? Would the issues with which he is concerned be better interrogated if they were discussed in the context of the all-too-apparent realities of northern Mississippi as it exists empirically? Quite simply, why bother with Yoknapatawpha at all?

Faulkner's scope is, of course, much bigger than such questions would presume. A glance at the formal properties of any of his novels is enough to show us that Faulkner is concerned with rather more than writing about issues alone (though one could point to a noticeable shift towards such tendencies in his later career). Far more than just writing about race, gender, religion, honour, and so forth, the fiction is concerned with creating those very elements themselves, and the contexts in which they can or may be created. In requiring the very environment in which these dramas will play to be built from scratch—the stage as well as the players—the reader is involved in their substance at every level to a far greater extent than would be possible by the characters being placed in the "real" world. It is vitally important that Yoknapatawpha is of the same essential character as the South with which Faulkner is so clearly concerned, even as it sets itself up as a fictive other, for a large part of its power is that it enables us to partake in the construction of such a world, in which such socially vital concerns can develop. This emphasis does not, as may appear, distance us from the issues involved, but requires our engagement with them at a fundamental level, for in the relationship between Faulkner and the reader, and the characters that evolve between us, not just our attention but our understanding, empathy, cognition and willingness to put our own identity into the equation are paramount. To read and write Yoknapatawpha is not just to perceive a world, it is to build one.

This is also a recognition of the potential power of fiction as a means for coming to an understanding of the world. That our task is so much larger

than it would be if reading about Oxford and Lafayette County is a recognition that fiction can engage with the very processes involved in the construction of our everyday lives. I have noted the similarities between the construction of character and event as taking place between writer and reader figures within the fiction, and as occurring between the writer and the reader of the text, and that these tendencies are so prevalent throughout the Yoknapatawpha series is an indication not just of the scale of intent behind this particular series of novels, but of the possibilities involved in the fictive process. In relation to how far the reader's own identity becomes part of the Yoknapatawpha landscape, we might question to what extent the reader is required to act in any particular way, or, conversely, to what extent he or she is "formed" by the experience of Yoknapatawpha. Norman N. Holland's discussion of the highly comparable processes involved in the construction of personal identity and textual unity can be applied across the series as a whole, particularly with regard to the importance of the reader's own need, whether conscious or otherwise, to "mak[e] ourselves part of the literary text" as we interpret it.[24] Likewise, Iser's noting of the importance of "the individual disposition of the reader" in realising the work,[25] and of "the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own,"[26] places an emphasis on the individuality of the reader as crucial to creative interpretation. I have applied such theories to particular texts during my study, but in considering the construction of Yoknapatawpha over the series, they can be seen to be equally applicable.

In my discussion of *Sanctuary,* I touched on the issue of Faulkner's apparent expectation of a male readership for this novel, and the potential implications for its realisation when read by somebody outside the parameters of any "intended" audience. We can extend the connotations of this, taking in some of Holland's and Iser's points, to Yoknapatawpha generally. Is there—or can there be—an "ideal" receptor-figure for Faulkner's series, and, if not, what difference does the reader's individual disposition or situation make? Mick Gidley points out that "throughout his writing life, although Faulkner was always ready to concede the importance to him of his own soil, he continually endorsed beliefs in the universality of human emotions, the 'eternal verities' of his Nobel Prize speech."[27] The most obvious way into the matter of whether he manages to portray these "verities" is to consider the geographical and historical contexts in which Faulkner was writing, and how this may relate to any given audience. As mentioned in Part One, the specificity of Faulkner's regionalism could potentially cause problems the further away his readership is from the time and place in which he lived and worked.

Faulkner claimed that the writer "ain't too interested in what the contemporary world thinks about him. He has a longer view, that he is aimed not at Jones of 1957 but of Jones of 2057 or 4057."[28] This notwithstanding, his contemporary readership is inevitably going to be the one with the most readily obvious ability to engage with his subject—particularly, we might say, a contemporary Southern or American one. We might be tempted to suggest that Yoknapatawpha is therefore likely to be best realised by someone in that particular world; that, furthermore, its ideal reader would be a white, male, reasonably liberal Southerner—a figure roughly akin to the author himself. But such a supposition would be ignore the structural implications of such books as *The Sound and the Fury,* with its requirement for *every* reader to engage, and *Absalom, Absalom!,* wherein the figure of Shreve, for instance, is a representation of a reader from "outside" the central story's sphere. On purely political or ideological grounds, of course, each reader is free to agree or disagree with Faulkner's apparent message, and the white supremacist can theoretically challenge his deconstruction of racial codes as much as the liberal can wish he would go further. But this will only ever be a small part of the Yoknapatawphan dynamic, the important point being that each reader will partake of the construction and interpretation of the county as much as he or she will in their own "actual" world. The viability of Yoknapatawpha as a literary construct is not affected either way by the viewpoints or standpoints of any particular reader: indeed, the very plurality of attitudes towards it that this will inevitably bring about, and the effect that these, in turn, will have on the continuing development of the county as they mingle and clash just as the accounts in *Absalom, Absalom!* do, only serves to make it *more* fruitful as a creative exercise. Just as Joe Christmas is ultimately the chronotopic product of the Yoknapatawphan dialogic that surrounds and regards him, so Yoknapatawpha itself is an infinitely heteroglot phenomenon, a convergence of every one of its interpreters, whether Southern or Northern or European or Asian, male or female, twentieth-century or forty-first century, and so on.

Ultimately, it would be in these Bakhtinian terms that I would suggest Yoknapatawpha can best be appreciated, at least as a framework within which to embark upon the more variable and specifically detailed investigations that study of its innumerable component parts so generously allows. For while I have made use of several applicable theories of reading and writing during the course of this book, it is the dialogism underlying both Bakhtin's approach to literature and, more importantly, the construction of Yoknapatawpha itself, that enables these creative processes to take place in all their interactive fullness. Bakhtin, of course, applies his ideas to novelistic

discourse in general, but in Faulkner's series of Yoknapatawpha novels we surely have an exemplary case of the theories in action. Yoknapatawpha is characterised by its plurality, readers and writers conflicting and working together to bring about a representation of life that is quite impossible to singularise. Just as in the construction of Joe Christmas, the heteroglossia of Yoknapatawpha is profound and fundamental, paradoxically being the most emblematic facet of a world that in this understanding can have no definitive emblem. If Yoknapatawpha can be said to exist, it is in the effectively infinite spaces between its many voices: Faulkner and his millions of readers past, present and future; the figures I have identified variously as "writer" or "reader" figures within the fiction; the huge numbers of men and women who populate the county; and, most importantly, in the intangible but constantly creative merging and clashing of each of these. As Bakhtin points out, the "word" and its "object" *always* relate to one another in an environment already made up of myriad meanings and intentions. Yoknapatawpha's dynamic is in this infinite plurality, and as such it might be said to exist in a very real sense. If we take the ramifications of what is involved in the creation of Yoknapatawpha to their possible extremes, we are able not only to come to an important and detailed understanding of a region and history that cries out for such sensitive attention, but of the very ways in which we read and write fiction, and the role that fiction can play in life. Maybe, to partly disagree with Ike McCaslin, the reading and writing of books *is* of some value in the midst of all this desolation. The greatest component in the "continual mutual interaction" between "work" and "world"[29] involved in the creation of Yoknapatawpha is the principle of interaction itself: to read and write the world of Faulkner's fiction is to partake of and contribute to a process of unusual and continuing power. Quentin Compson's great-great-grandfather reasons that there is no Yoknapatawpha "until we finish the goddamned thing,"[30] assuming a finality that can never be achieved. "*Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished,*" Quentin reflects in contrast, many years later.[31] Realising this, creating Yoknapatawpha, demands a great deal of us, but if we are willing to take up its writerly challenges, we will have a reading experience of quite extraordinary rewards.

Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Penguin, 1973), pp.31–2.
2. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (eds.), *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p.88.
3. Ibid, p.279.
4. The comparisons that can be made between Faulkner's and Hardy's fictional worlds are explored by John Rabbetts in *From Hardy to Faulkner: Wessex to Yoknapatawpha* (London: Macmillan, 1989). See also Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (London: Constable, 1966).
5. Gwynn and Blotner, ibid, p.9.

NOTES TO THE PART ONE INTRODUCTION

1. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p.261.
2. Roland Barthes, *S/Z,* trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), p.4.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (eds.), *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p.52.
2. William Faulkner, *The Reivers: A Reminiscence* (London: Penguin, 1970), p.122.
3. Gwynn and Blotner, ibid, p.61.
4. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image Music Text,* ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp.142–8.
5. Olga W. Vickery makes this point in *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p.28.

6. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (London: Penguin, 1967), p.11.
7. Ferdinand de Saussure, "The Object of Study," in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1988), pp.2–9. Saussure's focus is specifically linguistic—*langue* referring to an overall language system, and *parole* to an individual speech act—but we can easily see the principle at work in Benjy's particular mode of comprehension (or, rather, lack of one). Indeed, the linguistic tenor of this model is ironically appropriate for a discussion of Benjy, a character constructed through language yet possessing none of his own, as we shall see.
8. Faulkner, ibid, p.244.
9. Ibid, p.19.
10. Ibid, p.14.
11. Ibid, p.43.
12. Ibid, p.16 and passim.
13. Ibid, p.45.
14. Pierre Macherey, "The Text Says What It Does Not Say," trans. G. Wall, in Dennis Walder (ed.), *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.215.
15. Ibid, p.217.
16. Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.57.
17. Faulkner, ibid, pp.53–4.
18. Ibid, p.53.
19. Vickery, ibid, p.30, and Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (London: Constable, 1966), p.91.
20. Gwynn and Blotner, ibid, p.32 and p.84. Faulkner's distancing himself from the authorial voice in the novel is important, as shall become clear when we look at the final section.
21. Iser, ibid, p.57.
22. Faulkner, ibid, p.73.
23. Ibid, p.73.
24. Ibid, pp.81–2.
25. Ibid, p.135.
26. Ibid, p.163.
27. Ibid, p.252.
28. Ibid, p.255.
29. Ibid, p.259.
30. Quentin's father and grandfather are also important figures in the narration of *Absalom, Absalom!,* of course. My reference here is to Quentin's generation of Compsons, the main protagonists of *The Sound and the Fury.*
31. William Faulkner, "The Compsons 1699–1945" in William Faulkner, *The Portable Faulkner,* ed. Malcolm Cowley (London: Viking, 1977), p.743.

32. Gwynn and Blotner, ibid, p.1.
33. Faulkner, ibid, p.744.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Critical coverage of this process includes Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp.163–4. The version originally submitted for publication in 1929 was eventually published as William Faulkner, *Sanctuary: The Original Text,* ed. Noel Polk (New York: Random House, 1981).
2. William Faulkner, "'Introduction' to *Sanctuary,*" in Henry Claridge (ed.), *William Faulkner: Critical Assessments,* vol. 3 (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1999), p.3.
3. William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (New York: Vintage, 1993), pp.3–4.
4. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (London: Penguin, 1967), p.11.
5. Faulkner, *Sanctuary,* p.4.
6. Ibid, p.4
7. Ibid, p.5.
8. Ibid, p.28.
9. Gray, ibid, p.167.
10. Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp.1–6. Gibson's model will be discussed more fully with relation to the readership of John Sartoris in Part Three.
11. The issue of Faulkner and *Sanctuary*'s attitude towards women is a highly complex one that is the deserving subject of some fine studies. See, for example, Minrose Gwin, *The Feminine and Faulkner* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), and John N. Duvall, *Faulkner's Marginal Couple: Invisible, Outlaw, and Unspeakable Communities* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990). That I do not focus on it here is not to suggest that I consider it to be of lesser importance, but simply to concentrate upon the particular matter in hand. Though this inevitably touches upon elements of Faulkner's, the novel's and the reader's alleged misogyny, I do not wish to retread similar ground to that already amply covered: this would be both unnecessary and counter-productive.
12. Olga W. Vickery suggests that "victim though she may be, Temple is also the cause of her victimization. The responsibility for the rape and hence for Tommy's murder is as much Temple's who provoked it as it is Goodwin's who did not act to prevent it or Popeye's who actually committed it." (Olga W. Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p.113). Lawrence S. Kubie asserts "That Temple invited the assault with her provocative, if unconscious,

exhibitionism, is unquestionable." ("William Faulkner's *Sanctuary,*" originally published in *The Saturday Review of Literature,* 11, 20 October 1934, taken here from Henry Claridge (ed.), *William Faulkner: Critical Assessments,* vol. 3, (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1999).p.32.)

13. Faulkner, ibid, p.129.
14. Ibid, p.48.
15. Ibid, pp.68–9.
16. Ibid, p.69.
17. Ibid, p.70.
18. Ibid, p.71.
19. Ibid, p.70.
20. Ibid, p.89.
21. Ibid, p.91.
22. For instance, A. C. Ward, in 1932, called *Sanctuary* "a prolonged essay in sadism" for which "[t]here can be no justification in art," (quoted in John Bassett (ed.), *William Faulkner: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp.134–5).
23. Faulkner, ibid, p.74.
24. Ibid, p.100.
25. Ibid, p.101.
26. Ibid, p.102.
27. Ibid, pp. 258–9.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. William Faulkner, *Sartoris* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), pp.1-2.
2. Ibid, p.2.
3. William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p.11.
4. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p.77.
5. Faulkner, ibid, p.76.
6. Faulkner, *Sartoris*, p.23.
7. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), p.4.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p.16.
2. Ibid, p.46.
3. Cleanth Brooks, in *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p.293, observes that "Psychologically,

Sutpen is the convert. . . . Like the convert, he outdoes in his vehement orthodoxy those generations old in the faith."

4. Faulkner, ibid, p.39.
5. M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp.276–7.
6. M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination,* p.254.
7. As shall be seen in my discussion of Cleanth Brooks and his combatants below, such notions as "time-honoured traditions" have to be treated with extreme caution in the context: at this formative stage in Southern history—the 1830s—such assertions of longevity have limited viability. My reference here is to the adherence to such codes, both on the part of the Yoknapatawpha planters and such narrators as Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson, rather than to imply their actuality. The historical processes at work here are discussed at length in the first section of W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage, 1991). The literary construction of an old South heritage is also explored in Richard Gray, *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).
8. Ilse Dusoir Lind, "The Design and Meaning of *Absalom, Absalom!*" (1955), in Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (eds.), *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963), p.304.
9. Ibid, p.300.
10. Olga W. Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), p.93.
11. It is interesting to note that Brooks first began to develop this reading of Sutpen as early as 1951, in an article for the *Sewanee Review* (59) that eventually formed part of the chapter on *Absalom, Absalom!* in his *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country;* we should therefore remember that the majority view among serious critics of the novel, as outlined above, has mostly emerged *after* Brooks's atypical one, even if not as a direct response to it. Brooks himself, fully aware of the perceived heresy of his reading, asserts that both Vickery and Lind must in part be responding to it (Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963, p.426)). As late as 1978, he notes his continuing isolation on this point: "I daresay that I have not won many over to my own view of the matter." (*William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond,* p.283.)
12. Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country,* p.298.
13. Brooks himself links Sutpen and Gatsby, along with Henry James's Newman, from *The American,* in "The American 'Innocence' in James, Fitzgerald and Faulkner" (1964), in *A Shaping Joy: Studies in the Writer's Craft* (London: Methuen, 1971).

14. Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country,* p.301.
15. Brooks, *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond,* p.293.
16. Ibid, p.300.
17. Lind, ibid, p.299.
18. This relationship will be discussed in Part Three.
19. Eric Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p.101.
20. James A. Snead, *Figures of Division: William Faulkner's Major Novels* (New York: Methuen, 1986), pp.113–4.
21. Ibid, pp.109–10.
22. Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the South, 1930–1955* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.120.
23. Richard H. King, "Faulkner, Ideology, and Narrative," in Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (eds.), *Faulkner and Ideology: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1992* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995), p.39.
24. King, *A Southern Renaissance,* pp.143–4. I shall discuss some of the issues surrounding Faulkner's map of Yoknapatawpha in my concluding chapter. We can find further discussion of Sutpen as "an avatar of the artist as demonic demiurge, a frustrated version of the romantic creator" in Lothar Hönnighausen, *Faulkner: Masks and Metaphors* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), p.157. This book provides an extended treatment of the extent of Faulkner's role-playing in his novels.
25. King, "Faulkner, Ideology, and Narrative," pp.29–30.
26. Richard Godden, *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.116.
27. Philip M. Weinstein, *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 139–40.
28. Faulkner, ibid, p.247.
29. Ibid, p.303.
30. Ibid, p.246.
31. Godden, ibid, p.49. On pp.49–79 of this book, Godden presents a rich discussion of the meanings to be drawn from this particular episode in Sutpen's related life, with the emphasis on Sutpen as a "labor lord" and the crucial problems of race and class that arise from the story and its telling.
32. Noel Polk, "'The force that through the green fuse drives': Faulkner and the Greening of American History," in Joseph R. Urgo & Ann J. Abadie (eds.), *Faulkner in America: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1998* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), pp.45–63.
33. Faulkner, ibid, p.227.
34. Ibid, p.220
35. Ibid, p.234.
36. John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopskins University Press, 1975).

37. King, *A Southern Renaissance,* p.123.
38. Again, following W. J. Cash, *et al,* this somewhat spurious claim to a long heritage is referred to here as a concept or construct, rather than an actuality.
39. Myra Jehlen, in discussing Sutpen's story as a commentary on the agrarian class conflict, reflects that his life "is characterized by a kind of irony which operates to turn everything he does against him. This irony is activated by Sutpen's ignorance of the forces with which he deals or his incomplete understanding of them. Indeed this is the hallmark of his career, beginning with his surprise at encountering upper-class snobbery and ending in a fatal lack of awareness that even hirelings have feelings. . . . This quality is useful in enabling Faulkner to reveal the darker realities of the plantation system as they manifest themselves to thwart Sutpen's expectations." (*Class and Character in Faulkner's South* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p.68.)
40. Faulkner, ibid, p.274.
41. Ibid, p.161.
42. King, ibid, p.124. See also King, "Faulkner, Ideology, and Narrative," p.30.
43. Faulkner, ibid, pp.127–8. I shall discuss the passage from which these images are taken in Part Four.
44. As discussed in Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p.372. See also King, *A Southern Renaissance,* pp. 143–3.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. William Faulkner, *The Mansion* (London: Reprint Society, 1962), p.348.
2. After the publication of *The Mansion* in 1959, there was, of course, Faulkner's final novel, *The Reivers,* still to complete the Yoknapatawpha series. This notwithstanding, however, the sense of profound "letting go" inherent in the third Snopes volume, as discussed in Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp.346–57, along with its marking of the last point in time covered by any of the novels—1948—does lend it an air of closure against which the comparatively lightweight *The Reivers* seems rather more a humorous and nostalgic coda than a further movement.
3. Hans H. Skei, *Reading Faulkner's Best Short Stories* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), pp.55–58.
4. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (New York: Random House, 1940), p.22.
5. Ibid, p.25.
6. Richard Gray, ibid, p.255. Richard Godden, in "Earthing *The Hamlet:* an Anti-Ratliffian Reading," in *The Faulkner Journal,* 14, ii (1999), pp.82–3, gives a useful account of various critics' appraisals of Flem's role in Yoknapatawpha, the majority taking the view that he should be read primarily as a pure representation of capitalism, and therefore as an agent of the "New

South," fundamentally opposed to the traditional values of Frenchman's Bend. Gray's and Godden's accounts, while differing in emphases, both allow for much less systematic and simplistic readings of Flem that more fully assess his impact on an economy that is, in Godden's words, "historically particular."

7. William Faulkner, *The Town* (New York: Vintage, 1961), p.29.
8. Faulkner, *The Mansion,* p.372.
9. Adapted from Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993), p.113.
10. Ibid, p.114–5.
11. Ibid, p.118.
12. Ibid, p.119.
13. Ibid, p.122.
14. Ibid, p.128.
15. This process is discussed extensively in Richard Gray's *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997). Roland Barthes's ideas of myth are also discussed in relation to Southern literature on pp.271–3 of this book.
16. Barthes, ibid, p.109. Barthes understands "discourse" and "speech" to refer here to *all* types, including pictorial representation.
17. Myra Jehlen, in her reductive assessment of the Snopes trilogy, asks this very question, but with rather different ends to my own, as I shall discuss later in this chapter. (Myra Jehlen, *Class and Character in Faulkner's South* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p.161).
18. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image Music Text,* ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp.142–8.
19. M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," in M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.254.
20. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination,* pp.276–7.
21. Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner,* p.256.
22. Faulkner, *The Hamlet,* p.4. This shady character, denoted as "French" only because he was not Mississippian, is every bit as much a part of Yoknapatawpha history as the Compsons, Sartorises and Sutpens, with whom many parallels are suggested in the sparse details we *are* given of his life. However, he is destined to remain, at least insofar as the novels are concerned, shrouded in the secrecy imposed by lack of local knowledge. Such little-known characters are important in the Yoknapatawphan project, however, as they serve to contextualise those figures who *are* submitted to the kind of intense scrutiny that we see in *Absalom, Absalom!*
23. Ibid, p.7.
24. Ibid, p.58.

25. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p.181.
26. Olga W. Vickery points to Flem's patterning of himself upon the model of Will and Jody Varner, and suggests that "as each new Snopes arrives, he is seen to be a slightly blurred carbon copy of the preceding one." (Olga W. Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964, p.169.)
27. Faulkner, *The Town,* p.259.
28. Jehlen, ibid, p.157.
29. Brooks, ibid, p.214.
30. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (eds.), *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p.120.

NOTES TO THE PART THREE INTRODUCTION

1. I refer here to the novels that I have discussed in Part Two, in which Sartoris, Sutpen and Snopes act as varying kinds of central figures. As I shall discuss in my concluding chapter, these characters make other appearances throughout the Yoknapatawpha series, this having important ramifications both for the people themselves and for the overall construction of the county.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. Joseph Blotner (ed.), *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (London: Scholar Press, 1977), p.84. As Richard Gray mentions, Faulkner was later to speak of *The Unvanquished* itself in a more forgiving light, and, as ever, such comments upon his own work should be treated carefully. (Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p.226.) However, this dismissal is a telling reminder of the comparatively lowly origins of the novel, at least in conception, that perhaps is useful when considering other more acclaimed books that developed in similar ways, such as *Go Down, Moses,* and to a certain extent the Snopes trilogy.
2. William Faulkner, *Sartoris* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), p.298.
3. Ibid, p.104.
4. Daniel J. Singal, *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p.97. Singal's useful study of the Sartoris myth's relation to Faulkner's own family background concentrates primarily on the figure of "young" Bayard, as portrayed in the original *Flags in the Dust,* but his observations are generally applicable to the presentation given in *Sartoris* as well.
5. Ibid, pp.103–4. It is worth noting that the "three generations" does not include the generation between the two Bayards, which Faulkner himself

somewhat glibly dismissed as living when "nothing happened to Americans to speak of." (Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner (eds.), *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p.251.).

6. Roland Barthes, *S/Z,* trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), pp.4–16.
7. Ibid, p.4.
8. Ibid, p.4.
9. Gray, ibid, p.133.
10. The phrases "Old Marster" and "Marse John" are used most often by Simon, the old, black, family servant, in *Sartoris,* with the inevitable overtones of slavery that that entails.
11. As opposed to the *published* history, *The Unvanquished* appearing some nine years after *Sartoris.*
12. William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p.11.
13. Jane P. Tompkins, "An Introduction to Reader-Response Criticism," in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.x.
14. Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers" in Tompkins, ibid, p.1.
15. Ibid, p.1.
16. Ibid, p.5.
17. Fish and Iser are among the theorists I shall consider in my discussion of readership within *Absalom, Absalom!,* to follow. My use of the comparatively limited theory of Walker Gibson in this instance is in direct relation to the similarly comparable limitations in readership in *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished.*
18. Faulkner, *The Unvanquished,* p.247
19. Ibid, p.291.
20. Faulkner, *Sartoris,* p.92.
21. Singal, ibid, pp.103–4.
22. Faulkner, *Sartoris,* p.218.
23. Ibid, p.245.
24. Singal, ibid, pp.101–4.
25. Faulkner, ibid, p.167.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), p.254.

2. Donald M. Kartiganer provides a good basis for such a study of this aspect of *Absalom, Absalom!,* giving a detailed reading of the novel which takes Henry Sutpen's killing of Charles Bon as the novel's one "known" fact and discussing the various narrators' attitudes and narrative actions as they interpret and/or construct the event. See Donald M. Kartiganer, *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), pp.69–106.
3. Norman N. Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.121.
4. Ibid, p.118.
5. Ibid, p.120.
6. Ibid, pp.119–20.
7. Ibid, p.120.
8. Ibid, p.121.
9. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), pp.100–1.
10. Ibid, pp.261–2.
11. Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," in Tompkins, ibid, p.1–6.
12. Holland, ibid, p.123. Holland illustrates this point with reference to his own *5 Readers Reading,* in which he compares the responses of a group of his students to (conveniently) Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily."
13. Ibid, p.124.
14. Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum,*" in Tompkins, ibid, p.174. Fish's primary focus is upon the formal unit in literature, and his argument is taken to the extent of showing that such things as line endings only exist because we decide they do. While my own argument in relation to *Absalom, Absalom!* is rather more thematic than this, the principle of Fish's point still applies to the decisions made about Thomas Sutpen, and is linked to the different concentration of, for instance, Holland's essay in its positioning of the motivating consciousness in the figure of the reader as opposed to the writer or the text.
15. Ibid, p.176.
16. Ibid, p.176.
17. Faulkner, ibid, p.31.
18. Ibid, p.95.
19. Ibid, p.62.
20. Holland, ibid, p.123.
21. Faulkner, ibid, p.146.
22. Ibid, p.147.
23. Ibid, p.303.

24. Roland Végsö, "'Let me play a while now': The Hermeneutics of Heritage and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!,*" in *Amerikastudien/American Studies,* 42, iv (1997), p.625.
25. Ibid, p.630.
26. Ibid, p.635.
27. Philip Rahv, review (in *New Masses,* 24 November 1936), in John Bassett (ed.), *William Faulkner: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.210.
28. William Troy, "The Poetry of Doom" (*Nation,* 31 October 1936), in Bassett, ibid, p.196.
29. Faulkner, ibid, p.9.
30. Ibid, p.7.
31. For a useful discussion of *Absalom, Absalom!*'s narrators in terms of R. G. Collingwood's "ideal" historian, see Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp.207–9.
32. Faulkner, ibid, p.32.
33. Ibid, p.14.
34. Ibid, p.49.
35. Ibid, p.59.
36. Ibid, pp.73–4.
37. Ibid, p.143.
38. Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in Tompkins, ibid, p.50. This essay also forms part of Iser's *The Implied Reader: Patterns in Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), but my references here are to the Tompkins anthology.
39. In Chapter 2 of *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), Iser directly comments upon Holland's and Fish's individual work, among many others, acknowledging their importance but highlighting the deficiencies of their theories, according to his own model. My purpose here is less programmatic: while I do feel that Iser's work more fully complements the process we see in *Absalom, Absalom!,* I am not so keen to promote him at the expense of the other theories I have discussed in relation to what happens within this novel itself. Despite Iser's partial rejection, I feel that we do dramatically witness the processes Holland and Fish variously describe in the gradual accumulation of narrative; in the second half of the novel, however, the situation is broadened to the extent that Iser's more inclusive account is more relevant.
40. Iser, "The Reading Process," pp.51–2.
41. Ibid, p.51.
42. Ibid, p.55. Iser goes on to point out the tendency of many modern texts to exploit this, and a certain correlation can be made here with Barthes's discussion of readerly and writerly texts in *S/Z.* Furthermore, we could also

bear in mind Pierre Macherey's "areas of shadow," with relation to the "gaps" that Iser posits as essential. (Pierre Macherey, "The Text Says What It Does Not Say," trans. G. Wall, in Dennis Walder (ed.), *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.215–222.

43. Iser, ibid, p.55.
44. Ibid, p.57.
45. Faulkner, ibid, pp.178–9.
46. Donald M. Kartiganer's reading of the intense relationship between Quentin and Shreve similarly notes the processes of creation that only come to fruition as they tell the story together, but rather posits Shreve as subject to Quentin's narrative will: "Shreve, as his name denotes, is involved in an elaborate confession; he is the instrument through which Quentin comes into full *imaginative* possession of what previously he has known only in fact." See Kartiganer, ibid, p.101.
47. Faulkner, ibid, pp.345–6.
48. Iser, ibid, p.56.

NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

1. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p.303.
2. Ibid, pp.345–6.
3. I shall return to this last point in my final chapter.
4. William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (New York: Random House, 1940), pp. 48–9.
5. For further discussion of the relationship between the authorial voice and characters' consciousness, but with more emphasis on *The Mansion,* see Warren Beck, *Man in Motion: Faulkner's Trilogy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), pp.44–7.
6. Faulkner, ibid, p.61.
7. Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p.254.
8. Ibid, pp.268–9.
9. Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum,*" in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.182.
10. Ibid, p.182.
11. Ibid, p.182.
12. Warren Beck points out that "Faulkner's choruses . . . are not in the classical mode; they are more personalized dramatically, subordinating the voice of the poet, enfranchising the speaker as *persona.* Whether the comment is from any single character or in the dialogue of two or three, there are subtle

but persistent variations to accord with different minds and temperaments." (Beck, ibid, p.48.)

13. William Faulkner, *The Town* (New York: Vintage, 1961), p.3.
14. In an early and very positive review of the novel, Steven Marcus calls *The Town* "the most interesting book William Faulkner has published in fifteen years" and praises it for reviving "the direct, dramatic mode of *As I Lay Dying.*" (Steven Marcus, "Snopes Revisited," originally a review in *Partisan Review,* Summer 1957, quoted here from Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (eds.), *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963), p.382.)
15. Faulkner, ibid, p.202.
16. Ibid, p.211.
17. Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers" in Tompkins, ibid, p.1.
18. Faulkner, ibid, pp.315–6.
19. Ibid, p.317.
20. Ibid, p.296.
21. Ibid, p.153.
22. William Faulkner, *The Mansion* (London: Reprint Society, 1962), p.6. I shall return to issues suggested by this introductory note in my final chapter.
23. Ibid, p.11 and passim.
24. Ibid, p.120.
25. Ibid, p.119.
26. Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in Tompkins, ibid, p.56.
27. Ibid, p.64.
28. Faulkner, *The Hamlet,* p.79.
29. Ibid, p.101. Richard Godden has discussed how Ratliff himself should not be automatically considered as *The Hamlet*'s ultimate anti-Snopes, as a pure authorial mouthpiece, but rather as someone with somewhat common interests: " . . . Ratliff's perception of Flem needs to be recognized as partial, interested and class based. Despite posing as Flem's arch-rival, and seeming to exist as his antithesis . . . Ratliff shares much with Flem, not least that both quit rented fields for versions of the store. Indeed, it might be argued that similarity of class origin might partially validate Ratliff's judgments on Flem, were it not that Ratliff's own stepping from the agricultural ladder leads him to depoliticize his own antecedents . . ." (Richard Godden, "Earthing *The Hamlet,* An Anti-Ratliffian Reading," in *The Faulkner Journal,* 14, ii (1999), pp.86–7).
30. Faulkner, ibid, p.367.
31. Faulkner, *The Town,* p.285.
32. Beck, ibid, p.59.

NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

1. Richard Godden and Noel Polk, "Reading the Ledgers," in *Mississippi Quarterly,* 55, 3 (Summer 2002), pp.301–359.
2. Nor will I trawl through a bibliographical account of who has agreed or disagreed with whom about the readings, as such an exercise is more than superfluous given the regular lists in the extant criticism. Godden and Polk's article includes useful bibliographical information, particularly about the large body of work with which they disagree; such lists can also be found in the notes of, for example, Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua, "'Let Me Talk Now': Chronotopes and Discourse in *The Bear,*" in *Journal of the Short Story in English,* 42 (2004), pp.33–59, and John G. Peters, "Repudiation, Wilderness, Birthright: Reconciling Conflicting Views of Faulkner's Ike McCaslin," in *English Language Notes,* 33.3 (1996), pp.39–46.
3. Richard Gray, *William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p.282. Gray's overall view is that the two narratives ultimately fail to work together.
4. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (London: Penguin, 1961), p.199.
5. Faulkner, ibid, pp.200–1.
6. Ibid, p.202.
7. Godden and Polk, ibid, p.305. The authors go on to raise these questions: "Do they speak to each other except in these journals? Is there no oral communication of any sort? What, then, are their days like? If they have been lovers, do they continue silently to occupy the same bed? Has Brownlee already come between them, separating them as lovers, and rendering them at least temporarily past any 'oral intercourse'?" They note that some of the questions they ask and answers they provide are not necessarily critics' usual ones of this tale. Their lengthy discussion of the Brownlee element and the ledger-reading as a whole (pp.301–359) is a quite superb (very) close reading of the spare materials at hand, which makes much of the homosexual inferences to be found in the story to construct an even more extreme narrative than that of incest and miscegenation usually discerned, and in which Buck and Buddy are far from the comparative innocents often portrayed (including by myself). At times, I find myself willing their argument to work rather than being totally convinced by it—despite my overall interest in the reader's need to create from the materials at hand, I feel that Godden and Polk push the possibilities provided by the text a little too far, notwithstanding the assiduousness of their reasoning and the plausibility of their case on its own terms. Nonetheless, it remains a remarkable feat of textual detective work and a compelling re-evaluation of a much-discussed work, and is one reason why I am not attempting a point-by-point reading of the ledger-reading here: though I may come to some different conclusions, I prefer strongly to recommend Godden and Polk's piece rather than attempt to emulate what they have done so well.

8. Faulkner, ibid, p.201.
9. Pierre Macherey, "The Text Says What It Does Not Say," trans. G. Wall, in Dennis Walder (ed.), *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.215.
10. See note 7.
11. Faulkner, ibid, p.202.
12. Ibid, p.200.
13. Ibid, p.200.
14. Ibid, p.200.
15. Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua notes how this is a "parody" of conventional slave-keeping practice, further noting that while the twins are deeply uncomfortable with the slave system, "they remain incapable of recognizing the slaves' full humanity." Bevilacqua, ibid, p.43.
16. See Godden and Polk, ibid, pp.343–7.
17. Faulkner, ibid, p.202.
18. Ibid, p.204.
19. Ibid, p.204.
20. Ibid, p.203.
21. Ibid, p.204.
22. Ibid, pp.204–5.
23. Ibid, p.206.
24. Though Godden and Polk argue that Ike's determination to have Carothers as his "villain of choice" does indeed lead him to an inaccurate reading, and even deliberately so. Godden and Polk, ibid, p.324.
25. See also Dirk Kuyk, Jr., *Threads Cable-strong: William Faulkner's* Go Down, Moses (East Brunswick, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1983), p.116.
26. Wesley Morris with Barbara Alverson Morris, *Reading Faulkner* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p.109.
27. "Rememory" is a concept that resonates throughout Toni Morrison's work, and is most explicitly employed in her 1987 novel *Beloved.*
28. Faulkner, ibid, p.207.
29. Ibid, pp.198–9.
30. Dirk Kuyk, Jr., suggests that "against Cass's historical view Ike juxtaposes his mythic one." Dirk Kuyk, Jr., *Threads Cable-strong: William Faulkner's* Go Down, Moses (East Brunswick, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1983), p.111. Kuyk gives an account of the theological elements of the debate, and goes on to provide a version of the Brownlee text—another example of a detailed reading being extrapolated from the scant details of the text itself.
31. Faulkner, ibid, p.204.
32. Godden and Polk, ibid, p.324.
33. Faulkner, ibid, p.206.
34. Godden and Polk, ibid, pp.327–8.

35. William Faulkner, "The Stockholm Address," in Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery (eds.), *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), pp.347–8.
36. Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses,* ibid, p.234.
37. Ibid, p.235.
38. See Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993). See my Chapter Five for lengthier discussion of these processes in the Yoknapatawphan context.
39. Faulkner, ibid, p.211.
40. Ibid, p.212.
41. For instance, "A Word to Virginians," in Frederick L. Gwynn & Joseph L. Blotner (eds.), *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1995), pp.209–212.
42. Faulkner, ibid,p.212.
43. See Richard Gray's chapter on *Go Down, Moses* for a useful consideration of Faulkner's increasing despair at global events in the early 1940s, and the effects this came to have on his work. Gray, ibid, pp.271–289.
44. Morris and Morris, ibid, pp.123–4.
45. Gwynn & Blotner, p.246. John G. Peters' article (see note 2) discusses and attempts to reconcile critics' conflicting views over Ike's action, or lack thereof.
46. Kuyk, ibid, p.128.
47. Ibid, p.129.
48. Karl F. Zender, "Reading in 'The Bear,'" in *Faulkner Studies,* 1 (1980), p.94. Zender also considers other examples of literal reading acts in Faulkner, such as Hightower's reading of Tennyson and Shakespeare in *Light in August.*
49. Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), ibid, pp.51–2.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TEN

1. William Faulkner, *Light in August* (London: Penguin, 1964), p.80.
2. Ibid, p.350.
3. M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.276.
4. Ibid, p.276.
5. Ibid, p.280.
6. Assuming, of course, Bakhtin's version of dialogism to convince.
7. M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination,* p.250.

8. Ibid, p.250.
9. Ibid, p.254.
10. Ibid, p.254.
11. Faulkner, ibid, p.80.
12. Ibid, p.218.
13. Ibid, p.219.
14. Ibid, p.216.
15. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (London: Penguin, 1967), p.82.
16. Alfred Kazin, "The Stillness of *Light in August,*" in Frederick J. Hoffman & Olga W. Vickery (eds.), *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963), p.248.
17. Faulkner, *Light in August,* p.28 and *passim.*
18. Kazin, ibid, p.252.
19. Faulkner, ibid, p.94.
20. Ibid, p.96.
21. Ibid, p.97.
22. Roland Barthes, *S/Z,* trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), p.4.
23. Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.1. Gibson's model is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.
24. Faulkner, ibid, p.98.
25. Ibid, p.286.
26. Ibid, p.281.
27. Ibid, p.100.
28. Ibid, p.101.
29. Ibid, p.283.
30. Norman N. Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," in Tompkins, ibid, p.124.
31. Faulkner, ibid, p.108.
32. Ibid, p.109.
33. Ibid, pp.110–1.
34. Ibid, p.109.
35. Ibid, p.125.
36. Ibid, p.183.
37. Ibid, p.186.
38. Ibid, p.190.
39. Ibid, p.190.
40. Ibid, p.195.
41. Ibid, p.80.
42. Ibid, p.91.
43. Ibid, p.111.

44. Kazin, ibid, p.248.
45. Faulkner, ibid, p.119.
46. Ibid, p.127.
47. Ibid, p.139.
48. Ibid, p.148.
49. Ibid, p.157.
50. Ibid, p.164. William Van O'Connor, in *The Tangled Fire of William Faulkner* (New York: Gordian Press, 1968), p.75, also discusses how Bobbie uses the term "nigger" to get Joe beaten up.
51. Faulkner, ibid, p.165.
52. James A. Snead, *Figures of Division: William Faulkner's Major Novels* (New York: Methuen, 1986), p.88.
53. Faulkner, ibid, p.164.
54. The protagonist of Wright's *Native Son* is a useful comparison as his claiming of creative responsibility for Mary Dalton's death is also compelled by motivations of self-identification in the face of racial oppression.
55. Faulkner, ibid, p.199.
56. Ibid, p.25.
57. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p.32.
58. Arthur F. Kinney gives a subtle, extended close reading of this passage, focussing on the perspective of Byron Bunch, his ordering of his vision of "the stranger," and the other men's relative knowledge and distance. See Arthur F. Kinney, *Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style as Vision* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), pp.15–30.
59. Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum,*" in Tompkins, ibid, pp.164–84.
60. Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in Tompkins, ibid, pp.50–2.
61. Though this is not to ignore critical accusations, especially in more recent scholarship, of Faulkner's own racism, or his complicity in the situation he apparently critiques. I shall return to this issue in due course.
62. Faulkner, *Light in August,* p.26.
63. Iser, ibid, p.57. Having said this, it is astonishing how some critics have insisted on Joe's mixed blood as a *fact,* in effect taking Jefferson at its word and approving Gavin Stevens's surely preposterous thesis on the war between Joe's black and white blood.
64. Iser, ibid, pp.56–7.
65. Judith Bryant Wittenberg, "Race in *Light in August:* Wordsymbols and Obverse Reflections," in Philip M. Weinstein (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 159.
66. Heinz Ickstadt, "The Discourse of Race and the 'Passing' Text: Faulkner's *Light in August,*" in *Amerikastudien/American Studies,* 42, iv (1997), p.533.

Ickstadt's essay provides a useful account of critical handing of Faulkner and attitudes towards racial concerns, and puts forward a fine analysis of *Light in August*'s narrative complexity.

67. Myra Jehlen, *Class and Character in Faulkner's South* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp.90–1.
68. Snead, ibid, p.85.
69. Ibid, p.83.
70. Faulkner, ibid, p.45.
71. Snead, ibid, p.82.
72. Faulkner, ibid, p.349.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (London: Vintage, 1996), p.190.
2. Ibid, pp.191–2.
3. Ibid, pp.192–3.
4. Ibid, p.188.
5. Ibid, p.1.
6. M. M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.250.
7. Faulkner, ibid, pp.1–2.
8. Ibid, p.43.
9. Ibid, p.47.
10. Ibid, p.17.
11. Ibid, p.112.
12. Ibid, p.100.
13. Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp.156–7.
14. R. Rio-Jelliffe, *Obscurity's Myriad Components: The Theory and Practice of William Faulkner* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), pp.105–6.
15. Gray, ibid, p.155.
16. Richard Gray's essentially Bakhtinian reading of *As I Lay Dying* is particularly useful, as he also applies Bakhtin's model of the carnival as a communal act of social consciousness to the Bundrens and their effects on those who regard them (Gray, ibid, p.154).
17. Faulkner, ibid, pp.140–1.
18. Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum,*" in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.182.
19. Faulkner, ibid, p.83.
20. Ibid, p.166. Whitfield puts the command to confess in the mouth of God.

21. Ibid, pp.167–8.
22. Ibid, p.159.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWELVE

1. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), inside front cover. Richard Godden uses the map, to different ends, as the foundation of his discussion in "William Faulkner," in Richard Gray and Owen Robinson (eds.), *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp.436–453.
2. See, for example, Robert W. Kirk with Marvin Klotz, *Faulkner's People: A Complete Guide and Index to Characters in the Fiction of William Faulkner* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), pp.309–15.
3. Faulkner, ibid, pp.127–8.
4. Faulkner, *Light in August* (London: Penguin, 1964), p.187.
5. Ibid, p.187.
6. Ibid, p.191.
7. Ibid, p.192.
8. William Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), p.255.
9. William Faulkner, *The Mansion* (London: Reprint Society, 1962), p.297.
10. Ibid, p.306.
11. M.M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Towards a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.250.
12. Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in Jane P. Tompkins (ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.55. See also Pierre Macherey, "The Text Says What It Does Not Say," trans. G. Wall, in Dennis Walder (ed.), *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.215–22.
13. Iser, ibid, p.57.
14. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!,* p.187.
15. Any discussion of the intertextuality between *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!,* and of Quentin's role in this, must acknowledge the important work of John T. Irwin in *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
16. Iser, ibid, p.50.
17. Ibid, p.51.
18. Ibid, p.55.
19. Ibid, p.55.

20. Faulkner, *The Mansion,* p.6.
21. Letter addressed to Albert Erskine at Random House, 9 February 1959, in Joseph Blotner (ed.), *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (London: Scolar Press, 1977), p.422.
22. Most readers not being Cleanth Brooks, whose diligence I must acknowledge, in *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p.449. For similarly painstaking annotation, see, Kirk, ibid.
23. See, for example, Ward L. Miner, *The World of William Faulkner* (New York: Grove Press, 1952), and Don H. Doyle, *Faulkner's County: The Historical Roots of Yoknapatawpha County* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). For an extra-literary approach, Thomas S. Hines, *William Faulkner and the Tangible Past: The Architecture of Yoknapatawpha* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) is fascinating.
24. Norman N. Holland, "Unity Identity Text Self," in Tompkins, ibid, p.124.
25. Iser, ibid, p.50.
26. Ibid, p.57.
27. Mick Gidley, "Some Notes on Faulkner's Reading," in *Journal of American Studies,* 4 (1970), pp.98–9.
28. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (eds.), *Faulkner in the University* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p.64.
29. Bakhtin, ibid, p.254.
30. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Penguin, 1973), p.31.
31. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!,* p.261.

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