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The Traumatic Nexus of Race, History, and Narrative in the Work of William Faulkner

by

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ABSTRACT

William Faulkner's writing attempts to articulate the meaning of racial difference in the American South. And yet, more often than not, the arbitrary demarcations of racial difference, so crucial to the cultural identity of the American South, fall apart in his work, and racial difference loses its original meaning - that of suggesting there is an inherent, natural, and easily quantifiable difference among races. This project seeks to examine both the way this breakdown in racial difference is articulated, and what it means in Faulkner's work. Through a detailed examination of the psychoanalytic concept of trauma, this project demonstrates how the problematized referentiality of race - and its inevitable breakdown in Faulkner's work - is traumatic for the characters who encounter it. Each of the Faulkner novels examined here (Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, and Go Down, Moses) represents a complicated approach to race, and racial difference, and it is this complicated attitude towards race that finds its existence and expression through the notion, and language, of trauma.

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Introduction: Faulkner, Race, and Trauma

In Absalom, Absalom!, as Rosa Coldfield recounts to Quentin Compson her experience at Sutpen's Hundred, she fixates upon one event in particular, suggesting it has permanently altered her. Rosa explains to Quentin that the transportation of Charles Bon's dead body onto the Sutpen land was horrific, and ultimately impossible for her to understand. She says:

There are some things which happen to us which the intelligence and the senses refuse just as the stomach sometimes refuses what the palate has accepted but which digestion cannot compass - occurrences which stop us dead as though by some impalpable intervention, like a sheet of glass through which we watch all subsequent events transpire as though in a soundless vacuum, and fade, vanish; are gone, leaving us immobile, impotent, helpless; fixed until we can die. That was I. I was there...

(122)¹

In Rosa's attempt to make Quentin understand her story - as she tries to make Quentin a witness to an event she has witnessed so long ago - she focusses upon the manner in which the past has been imported into the present, influencing the experience and perception, of all "subsequent events". But Rosa's recourse to metaphor seeks to articulate the effect of the event, and not the event itself. And in suggesting that this particular event is "like a sheet of glass through which" she now sees all later events, she digresses from the narrative, providing information not important or relevant to any plot of the events at Sutpen's Hundred, but endowing this particular event with a unique

significance. Rosa suggests this experience has affected the very core of her being; it is a witnessing whose effects will be felt until her death. I believe that in this passage, Rosa characterizes this witnessing as a traumatic experience: her confrontation with Charles Bon's dead body leaves an imprint upon her psyche in a manner that can only be described as traumatic, and that can only be relayed through the language of trauma.

As the novel progresses, Rosa's story becomes clearer to both Quentin and the reader, and Rosa's experience, relayed relatively early in the novel, is contextualized within the larger narrative, or anecdote, of Sutpen's failure. Indeed, the novel itself drives towards Quentin's historical speculation, re-creation, and plotting of the Sutpen story, in an effort to order all the events and narratives previously relayed in the text. But Rosa's point here, it would seem, has less to do with providing a chronology of events, and everything to do with expressing the *nature* of the events and their impact upon her.

The Discourses of Faulkner

The amount of psychoanalytically informed criticism on Faulkner is, of course, massive, and justifiably so, since Faulkner's writing has always seemed to me to be particularly open to psychoanalysis. Even within its narrative unfoldings and infoldings of incest, miscegenation, and fratricide, Faulkner's work is always explicitly concerned with exploring the individual psychological handling of these plot points. Or rather, it is concerned with the *attempt* to psychologically handle these events. Like Rosa, most of Faulkner's characters are individual characterizations - psychological profiles - that strive to deal with very social events. The events of the Faulknerian plot, which could very easily and often be described as perverse or deviant in some way, are very rarely confined

to the quiet, private existence of solitary lives: they resonate outwards, and echo through the social sphere. And as these events necessarily become social through their narrativization, they implicate and address those who tell and hear these stories.

But, to be sure, Faulkner's works are not merely exercises in character psychology. They are gripping tales of life in the South, and are attempts to simultaneously capture the nuances and subtleties involved in the complexity of that life, and to articulate the experience of that life beyond the South. And in Faulkner's examinations of Southern life, racism - that pervasive disease present not only in the South but throughout all of America - imports into the text a very specific hermeneutic value. Said another way, I believe that Faulkner's texts - or at the very least the three I have assembled here - are preoccupied with communicating some statement on race. Or more specifically, and correctly, his writing represents the endeavour to arrive at some definitive 'statement' on race, but finally never does. Race is the central event, or phenomenon, explored in the plot of these texts (Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!, and Go Down, Moses), but is represented in each as a perplexing circumstance not easily articulated, or completely understood. And it is this plot element of racial difference that in its elusiveness and impossibility is psychologically disruptive for the characters who encounter it. Race, for both the characters and the reader, is like a "sheet of glass through which we watch all subsequent events transpire as though in a soundless vacuum, and fade, vanish; are gone, leaving us immobile, impotent, helpless".

What I have attempted here is a synchronic examination of the Faulknerian style and Faulknerian content: I attempt to articulate how the historical and social subject of race in his work is manipulated through the inner (psychological) reflections of the

(mainly white) characters who address it. And, conversely, it is through Faulkner's examinations of individual psychology that race is examined and attempted to be understood.

The Individual Trauma

Faulkner once said that “‘if one begins to write about the injustice of society, then one has stopped being primarily a novelist and has become a polemicist or a propagandist.’ The novelist must, he goes on to say, write about ‘people, not about the injustice or inhumanity of people’” (167)². It is this repudiation of the notion of the novelist as social reformer that makes it tenuous to suggest Faulkner writes ‘about’ social problems. For despite his obsession with the South, and its impossible history of racism, Faulkner does not write ‘about’ this in a literal, historical sense. Rather, he writes about individuals - he narrativizes individual lives - caught within the mesh of ideological, historical, and racial conflict. Faulkner's characters are people within particular circumstances, and while it may be easier to articulate the nature of these circumstances, be they ideological, historical, or some other literary/social ‘problem’, it is the individual within his circumstances that forms the crux of the Faulknerian narrative. Racial difference forms the background for most of Faulkner's work, and in the novels examined here race is more immediate. It is the everyday matrix in which these characters live, and it is one of the circumstances within which they (attempt to) survive. But race for these characters is not merely another factor impinging upon their already busy lives. Race, as articulated by Faulkner in these texts, affects these characters in a very specific psychological way.

Cathy Caruth writes that in all traumatic experience, there resides “the inability to witness the event as it occurs, or the ability to witness the *event* fully only at the cost of witnessing oneself. Central to the very immediacy of this experience, that is, is a gap which carries the force of the event and does so precisely at the expense of simple knowledge and memory. The force of this experience would appear to arise precisely, in other words, in the collapse of its understanding” (6)³. In Caruth’s formulation of the traumatic experience, she suggests that the nature of the traumatic experience is such that its forceful impact prevents even the simple possibility of understanding the event itself. The survivor experiences the traumatic event not as an easily quantifiable, and easily understood, ‘happening’, but rather as an ‘occurrence’ whose very existence is one of impossibility and uncertainty. The traumatic event is significantly unique in its intensity and immediacy, and in the survivor’s subsequent inability to properly, and thoroughly, integrate it into “knowledge and memory”. Indeed, Caruth clearly delineates the parameters that define an event, or experience, as traumatic:

... the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind... the wound of the mind - the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world - is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that... is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivors. (3-4)⁴

Because *psychic trauma* cannot be absorbed by the survivor in the immediate moment of its impact - in fact, its very force and surprise prevent it from ever being “fully known” or

understood - it resides in its latency, as the event is repeatedly revisited by the survivor, in an attempt to integrate it into consciousness. The attempt to understand trauma, or to experience it in its entirety, is necessarily deferred, but despite this deferral is never understood. The nature of trauma prevents its successful, complete coalescing within the psyche or consciousness of the survivor.

For Faulkner's characters, the "experience" of race, or the racialized "event", threatens to "collapse [their] understanding" of (Southern) racial difference. It is my assertion that the 'plots' in these novels possess at their core some racialized element - whether it is Joe Christmas's mysterious racial heritage, or Ike McCaslin's recognition that the slaves on his property are in fact his family - that is finally not understandable for the characters who encounter it. In each of these novels the empirical element of racial difference is broken down, and it is this racial collapse - this difficulty, and even impossibility, in demarcating race and racial difference - that is so difficult to understand, and is traumatic. Faulkner is, to be sure, concerned with relaying a 'good story', and with communicating to the reader a discernible and compelling sequence of events. But the Faulknerian *narrative* - Faulkner's narrative *concern* - is to demonstrate how these racialized events affect these characters. The bewildering and coiling sentences, the temporal leaps forward and backward, and the lengthy modernist stream-of-consciousness passages are all demonstrations of the psychological examination found in Faulkner, and are inextricably bound within the plot. And these narrative techniques show how the event of racial disintegration, like trauma, cannot be integrated into consciousness.

Locating Trauma within Narrative

What I have collected here are, I believe, the Faulkner texts which speak most immediately, and creatively, to the social problem of racism. While my analysis of each text essentially seeks to locate the manner in which, and within whom, race is presented as traumatic, together they function as a reading of the traumatic fallibility of racial difference. In each novel, the knowledge of racial difference, which functions as a system of signification and designation, is demonstrated to be arbitrary and consequently flawed in its functioning. It is this realization of failure in the systemic 'knowledge' of racial difference that is traumatic.

In Light in August I examine the figure of Joe Christmas as a threat to the community. Joe's potentially racially mixed heritage is explored in the novel as a possibility: it is alleged, hinted at, and speculated throughout, but never proven. Throughout the novel, Joe's possible blackness literally forces him out of the community, and the novel's climax resides in the murder and castration of Joe. This is a novel about the violence of racism, but one that fails to literally provide a 'nigger'. And because he occupies multiple racial positions, Joe subverts the containing power of language. What Faulkner demonstrates is the failure of language to properly and thoroughly contain individuals who are possibly racially mixed. The community's linguistic attempts to force Joe into a particular, and quantifiable, racial position simply do not function as intended, if at all. Language as a racialized system of ontology necessarily fails in Light in August, suggesting the failure of the community's entire belief system. And this failure - Joe's silent subversion of language - is nothing short of traumatic for the community.

Absalom, Absalom! is an exercise in historical reconstruction. Together Quentin and Shreve piece together fragments of the Sutpen story - fragments they have heard from various sources, all of which present different and relevant information, but no individual source providing the whole story - and eventually invent what they believe is the key event in the Sutpen story, the racialized showdown between half-brothers Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon. It is my belief that their historical work is simultaneously a narrative about trauma, and a traumatized narrative. Together, they create a narrative that attempts to speak about a specific historical trauma, but also, in their creation, negotiate the parameters of narratives that seek to recapture trauma, but are doomed to failure. The crucial confrontation between Henry and Charles that they construct rips apart the bonds of family and, in its effects, traumatizes those who encounter it. This is a story that possesses a trauma at its center, and Faulkner astutely articulates its subsequent narrativization through the terms of trauma: the language, narrative figures, and tropes in Absalom! articulate a trauma implicit in Sutpen's story. And it is this trauma that is finally speculated by Quentin.

Finally, in Go Down, Moses, Faulkner explores the artificial construction of racial difference. As Ike McCaslin returns to the historical ledgers in which his ancestors have recorded their slave-purchasing and multiplication, he makes the startling discovery that his grandfather not only raped a slave on his land, but also raped their daughter. Ike's grandfather, old Carothers McCaslin, a paternal model on the land for ambition and success, has enslaved his own family, who themselves are the product of his own incestuous desire. For Ike, this realization is nothing short of traumatic. As the paternal McCaslin he is entitled to inherit old Carothers material legacy, but Ike chooses to

renounce his heritage and patrimony, believing this is the only moral option available to him. In Ike's attempt to account for the sins of his fathers, he engages the historical importance of genealogy and attempts, in the present, to design an ethics that will properly address the past. The trauma that Ike experiences - his recognition of the violence of (his own familial) history - requires him to bear witness to the past, and to acknowledge it, in an attempt to correct it.

In each of these novels, I believe race and trauma are inseparable. Race, or racial difference, is experienced through trauma, a peculiar psychological phenomenon which compels the individual to respond in a very particular way. Like Rosa, the survivor of trauma is changed, becoming a new person whose perspective has been irreparably altered. More importantly, the traumatic survivor always carries with them the traumatic event; it is a psychic burden articulated through its narrativization. What I have attempted here is to illuminate the way in which narratives about trauma function, and to suggest that elusive element of race in Faulkner's fiction functions in a similar way. The recognition of the artificiality of racial difference is an "impalpable intervention" in the lives of these characters and is, ultimately, traumatic.

Chapter One: The Traumatic Subversion of Language in Light in August

After Joe Christmas murders Joanna Burden he evades capture, and is free from Jefferson where punishment for his crime awaits. While he is away from Jefferson, the town is afire with discussions about the murder, and in its discussions it foregrounds, among other things, Joe's racial heritage and the isolation of the Burden estate. Eventually Joe is caught, not in Jefferson but in the neighboring Mottstown. The narrator relays to the reader, through the collective or, perhaps more accurately, white voice of the community of Jefferson, how he was caught:

Then yesterday morning he come into Mottstown in broad daylight, on a Saturday with the town full of folks. He went into the barbershop like a white man, and because he looked like a white man they never suspected him... And then he walked the streets in broad daylight, like he owned the town, walking back and forth with people passing him a dozen times and not knowing it, until Halliday saw him and ran up and grabbed him and said, 'Aint your name Christmas?' and the nigger said it was. (349-50)¹

What the narrator, working in conjunction with the town or 'voice' of Jefferson, presents here is a systematic series of events. Joe arrives in Mottstown, gets his hair cut, goes for a walk, and is eventually recognized by a citizen as the 'nigger' murderer wanted by authorities in a nearby town. It is worth noting that as the narrator constructs the events in Mottstown, Joe is initially inconspicuous, since no one there "never suspected him", though when he is finally recognized as that 'nigger', he does not deny it. The narrator then goes on to explain the nature of the paradox that is Joe: that of appearing to be white

and moving through the town as white, while simultaneously being recognized as a 'nigger':

He never denied it. *He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so mad.* For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too. (emphasis mine 350)

While the narrator/community assume Joe should be running from punishment in fear and shame, he does the exact opposite: he lingers in the public areas of Mottstown, not in a profound or declarative act of resistance, but seemingly because it does not occur to him to do anything else. Perhaps more importantly, though, is the way in which Joe's actions are recounted to the reader. Joe's capture is presented here through the community's discussion of it, in a fairly straightforward, chronological manner. But inextricably bound up with this mini-narrative is the urgent concern of Joe's identity, the very issue that agitates and infuriates the community. He is a 'nigger' and a murderer but acts like neither, let alone both.

Strangely though, Joe does not act like the opposites of what the community deems him to be (i.e. white and innocent). In fact, he does not do anything, and makes no move to occupy any subject position through which they can identify him as a member of the community except for his name. This is construed by the narrator not as active, or even passive, resistance, but rather as Joe's complete lack of awareness of his place within their social structure. What frustrates them so much is not that he claims to be

what he is not, or even that he attempts to occupy a subjectivity different from the one of 'nigger murderer' they have designated for him, but that he is, or seems to be, completely oblivious to their need for him to position himself with respect to the identity dichotomies they present: black/white, guilty/innocent, shameful/respectable. To be sure, Joe is aware of his crime - he knows he is a criminal - and certainly knows that his impending punishment will be severe. But his criminality is only one discursive strand among the many that the community uses to define him. In that moment in Mottstown, as recounted above, these subject-defining discourses converge, not surprisingly, in the figure of Joe as he wanders the street, unconscious as to how he should behave in relation to those around him, who have so much invested in how he behaves. Indeed, Halliday's question of "Aint your name Christmas?" could be read as an attempt at interpellating Joe into the community around him. But, if this interpellation - this attempt to locate Joe as a member of the community - of Joe fails, it must be wondered where within the process it fails, and, ultimately, why.

Denying Representation: Evading a Singular, Racialized Subjectivity

Althusser writes about the process of interpellation, and the way in which it constructs subjects, that "the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'.* *There are no subjects except by and for their subjection*" (60)². Of course, Althusser is speaking of how the process of interpellation functions to compel individuals to participate in a (collective) mentality by providing them with a

false sense of freedom. The empowerment of individuals that seemingly exists when they choose to recognize themselves as others call them, simply does not exist. The individual is made to believe that he/she is an autonomous subject, but paradoxically cannot exist as such unless he/she recognizes his/her relation to others: interpellation is the concretization of some conceptual framework of 'identity', shared among individuals, and it (re)affirms 'individual' identity by identifying the individual with a 'community', since "there are no subjects except by and for their subjection". For Althusser, this shared conceptual framework is more succinctly termed 'ideology': "a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (55). The reason Joe's behaviour is so infuriating is precisely because he does not participate in the process of 'subjection', and thus fails to become a 'subject'. If Joe's failure to achieve a singular, individual identity is made manifest in his lack of response to Halliday, it is a two-fold failure. On the one hand, he fails to recognize his place within the community - a racialized place, since he is that 'nigger murderer' named Christmas. On the other, interpellation does not create identity, but rather confirms it and the individual. Joe does not merely ignore Halliday; if he did it could be presumed his actions would be more suspicious. Joe is completely unaware of Halliday's hailing him, thus denying the entire process of subjection/subject-formation, but also complicating the very nature of his identity. It is as though his own identity is in such a state of flux, or change, or instability, that it cannot be immobilized long enough for him to be interpellated. Joe does not merely deny his identity as designated by those around him; he denies the ways in which they attempt to confer identity.

Throughout his life, Joe's identity is constantly in transition. He never occupies a single position or name, nor does he situate himself on some fixed point between poles, but rather flows from site to site, often simultaneously occupying multiply conflicting names or social positions. This is most obviously the case in Light with race. He is a 'white nigger': black and white at the same time, inhabiting multiple racial codings which individually designate opposing aspects of identity. In terms of race, he is everything and nothing encapsulated in a single individual. And it is because of this racial ambiguity that Joe is capable of existing outside of subject positions designated for him by others.

Doreen Fowler writes that "...[Joe] desires to be an I separate from an other, but, without his conscious awareness, he resists prohibition, alienation, and lack that attend the constitution of the self... As a result, he is a subject adrift, and the outward sign of his psychic ambivalence is his racial indeterminacy" (74)³. What is perhaps most interesting in Fowler's conceptualization of Joe's evasion of subjectivity is that she sees the breakdown in his racial coding as similar to some kind of psychic breakdown. His "psychic ambivalence" - that behavioural indifference noted by Halliday - is akin to a kind of racial indifference, or lack of a clear position. More specifically, she locates this psychic breakdown in his inability to move fluidly between the symbolic and imaginary psychic registers. She suggests that "just as Joe does not know if he is black or white, he does not exist on either the symbolic or imaginary plane" (74). It may be tempting to proceed with a psychoanalytic examination of Joe, but a closer examination of what is meant by Joe oscillating between these two psychic registers reveals, perhaps unexpectedly, that it has everything to do with the way in which race is treated in the novel.

In summarizing the nature and interaction of the three registers in Lacanian theory, Karl E. Jirgens writes:

...the three Oedipal phases have an indirect relationship to three psychic levels or 'registers': (1) the 'imaginary'... corresponds to variations in the unconscious initiated by the formation of the ego... (2) the 'symbolic'... corresponds to the metonymic substitutions of the conscious mind; *the symbolic register serves an organizing function, particularly on a linguistic level, and thus provides a means by which the subject can enter society through language*; and (3) the 'real'... which serves a function of constancy and is beyond the realm of speech... (emphasis mine 397)⁴

Jirgens equates the symbolic with language (i.e. language is an organizer of thought), but more importantly for the purposes here, he also defines it as the medium through which the individual interacts with those around him/her. Or, put another way, an inability to appropriately access and engage those around one could indicate some kind of breakdown in the symbolic register of an individual. Joe does recognize his name when Halliday calls out to him, but does not, according to the community, recognize the implications of his name and what it should mean (fear, shame, guilt, blackness, etc.). He recognizes the name 'Christmas', but no solid, or tangible, meaning is attached to it. Fredric Jameson, quoting Lacan, defines the importance of the symbolic representation of the individual, the name:

..for the acquisition of a name results in a thorough-going transformation of the position of the subject in his object-world: "That a name, no matter how confused, designates a particular person - this is precisely what the

passage to the human state consists in. If we must define that moment in which man [sic] becomes human, we would say that it is at that instant when, as minimally as you like, he enters into a symbolic relationship.”
(362)⁵

According to Jameson’s re-working of Lacan, then, it would seem that Joe’s lack of recognition of what his own name would imply, means he is somehow not human. This is not to say that he is less than human, or foreign, or alien in some literal sense, but rather that he does not participate in the communal conceptual framework that would bestow an identity or subjectivity on him. Joe’s namelessness in this context means, then, that he stands outside, or confounds, the symbolic, somehow defying representation.

Of course, the very reason Joe defies individual representation (subject-formation) is because he defies a singular racial representation. After Joe is walloped by Bobbie’s friends, floating in and out of consciousness, he hears their voices discussing him:

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 than he does. These country bastards are liable to be anything

We’ll find out. We’ll see if his blood is black (219)

Joe defies description. His assailants cannot be certain whether or not he is black, since he “dont look like one”. They take recourse to Bobbie’s claim that he told her he is a

'nigger', but even her claim is suspect: she cannot be certain about Joe's racial makeup, just as he cannot since he does not appear to be black. Since Joe cannot be racially labeled through language, his identity cannot be completely known. But his ambiguous racial heritage is a problem, not just for those who would create his subjectivity, but also for himself. After this encounter with Bobbie's friends, he lives his life not merely as someone who may be black and who conceals this fact - 'passing' as a white man - but rather as someone who intentionally defies racial categorization, moving from one pole to the next, in various situations, typically for convenience.

Between meeting Bobbie and arriving in Jefferson, Joe lives life as a drifter, floating from town to town, from relationship to relationship: "from that night, the thousand streets ran as one street, with imperceptible corners and changes of scene" (223). In his geographical and emotional dislocation, there resonates his racial dislocation, his lack of a racial anchor. Yet throughout this journey without destination through America, Joe comes to rely on his blackness. We are told:

...beneath the dark and equivocal and symbolical archways of midnight he bedded with the women and paid them when he had the money, when he did not have it he bedded them anyway and then told them that he was a negro. For a while it worked; that was while he was still in the south. It was quite simple, quite easy. Usually all he risked was a cursing from the woman and the matron of the house, though now and then he was beaten unconscious by other patrons, to waken later in the street or in the jail. (224)

His dealings with the prostitutes is treated as completely matter of fact, as though there really could have been no other plan or option. It is as though, after Bobbie, he had no choice but to take advantage of his racial confusion. In fact, the prostitutes' reactions are so predictable it would be almost a waste to not benefit from them, and the cursings and beatings are treated as mere inconveniences to his way of life. But the simplicity of this way of life is shattered as he sleeps with one prostitute in particular:

That [his scheme of revealing his true 'racial' identity to prostitutes he could not pay] was while he was still in the (comparatively speaking) south. Because one night it did not work. He rose from the bed and told the woman that he was a negro. "You are?" she said. "I thought you were just another wop or something." She looked at him, without particular interest; then she evidently saw something in his face: she said, "What about it? You look all right. You ought to seen the shine I turned out just before your turn came." She was looking at him. She was quite still now. "Say, what do you think this dump is, anyhow? The Ritz hotel?" Then she quit talking. She was watching his face, staring at him, her face draining, her mouth open to scream. Then she did scream. It took two policemen to subdue him. At first they thought the woman was dead.

(225)

When she reveals her indifference to his claims of being "a negro", he physically lashes out at her with such intensity the police initially believe she is dead. Throughout this scene, there is a gradual movement in her persona from one of complete disinterest to total fear as she realizes his surprise at her attitude is bound to something more

complicated than her simply ignoring racialized codes of conduct. She speaks casually, yet upon looking at his face sees something in it, which compels her to speak further. Then, as she realizes that it is her words which have made him so angry, she stops speaking, only to scream. Yet, his anger manifests itself not because he is now forced to pay her, but rather because she literally does not care that he is black. While it can be presumed that Joe's anger is, in part, due to her disregard for his acknowledgment of society's racial scheme in which they, and he, have invested so much - indeed, his entire way of life could now be said to be a 'product' of his racial heritage - his anger seems to resonate from a much darker place within him, a place beyond language. The narrator does not say what precisely it is in Joe's face that causes the prostitute to recoil in horror, but rather uses her reaction to convey that "something" which is so horrifying. It is almost as though the expression on his face, and all the emotions and meaning it conveys, simply cannot exist, or be understood, without someone else present to make it real, echoing the implicitly social construction of individual identity.

In writing on the construction of the self through the symbolic realm, Jameson, relying on Rifflet-Lemaire, writes:

...the first person, the signifier, results in the division of the subject... which drives the 'real subject' as it were underground, and leaves a 'representative' - the ego - in its place: "The subject is figured in symbolism by a stand-in or substitute... whether... the personal pronoun 'I',... the name that is given him,... or the denomination 'son of'. This stand-in is of the order of the symbol or the signifier, an order *which is*

perpetuated only laterally, through the relationships entertained by that signifier with other signifiers..." (362-63)

What Jameson seeks to emphasize here is that the very nature of the individual is such that he/she can only be known by others as a representative, whether that representation be the 'I' the individual proposes or the name they put forth. This name, or proposed self, functions like the relationship between signifier and signified, insofar as the former is used to designate or speak about the latter. What is intriguing here is that Joe's dealing with this particular prostitute eventually results in her obstructing his signification of himself. As Ellman Crasnow writes, "Language is a system of signs that expresses ideas', and the interrelationship of signs thus determines meaning... the system of signs that comprises a language expresses no given or predetermined meanings; these arise from the interrelations of the system..." (216)⁶. If the subject can be realized only by entry into the symbolic (that is to say through communication with others), and this entry is not of the actual, or literal, individual, but via a representation of the individual, then this entire system of individual representation in the symbolic realm (the entire process of being) could be equated to the very process of signification. Yet this process of signification or naming is complicated by its very arbitrariness, where individual identity can be contested, since it exists only through its interrelationships with other identities. Said another way, the individual is not simply what he/she says he/she is, but rather only what proposed representations of their selves that others will acknowledge. And while this may seem to be a given, Joe is a specific problem in this general process. Joe attempts to confront the prostitute with his blackness because he does not have the money to pay her, and he expects her to be horrified and shocked like other prostitutes in the

past, but she is indifferent. And when he tells her about his blackness, something that is not visibly apparent, he offers her a representation of himself which, even though he assumes will cause her to be repulsed, will allow for an acknowledging of what he believes may be his 'true' identity. Joe's blackness, in this instance, functions like a kind of negative reinforcement, whereby confessing his true nature it will be acknowledged and he will come into being. Her indifference to his revelation breaks down his attempt at racial signification since she does not react as expected, and consequently, she denies Joe his very identity, or what he claims in this relationship his identity is. If, as Gregor Campbell suggests, "signification is the relationship that holds together the signifier and the signified"(627)⁷, then her interruption of this process splits the link that Joe has created in his mind between his hidden blackness and his 'self'. Through denying the importance of his blackness, she denies the validity of the terms - the language - that Joe believes provide him with identity.

After this incident, Joe lives as a black man, which is a complete inversion of his way of life before:

He was sick after that. He did not know until then that there were white women who would take a man with a black skin. He stayed sick for two years. Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked and teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them; now he fought the negro who called him white. (225)

The narrator characterizes Joe as 'sick' with the knowledge that white women would intentionally sleep with black men. Indeed, this 'sickness' lasts for two years, and Joe now seems to be repulsed by whites, preferring to live among blacks, and with a black

woman. Joe's "sickness" is the result of having his entire system of racial knowledge subverted. His upbringing in the south, and his being taught to vilify black skin, is thrown into question by this prostitute. Desperate to latch onto some kind of value system of racial identity, he lives his life the exact opposite of what he was taught: he now lives like a black man, and vilifies whites. Or, more specifically, rather than condemning the black in him, as he would have once believed would be the appropriate action, he now condemns the white in him. And, he further denies his white identity by fighting blacks who try to place him in that position.

Joe's struggle to understand, or at least to represent, his identity manifests itself in language. Donald M. Kartiganer writes that "the partly black Joe Christmas becomes a man who is unsure of just what his racial makeup is. His problem - Faulkner's narrative problem - is no longer to confront the difficulty of the racially mixed man in the South, but of not knowing what his origins really are" (289)⁸. Despite Joe moving from one racial position to another, and often choosing to float in between, he ultimately does not know his history. This is verbalized most thoroughly in his exchange with Joanna, when she questions him about his race:

"You dont have any idea who your parents were?"

If she could have seen his face she would have found it sullen, brooding.

"Except that one of them was part nigger. Like I told you before."

She was still looking at him; her voice told him that. It was quiet impersonal, interested without being curious. "How do you know that?"

He didn't answer for some time. The he said: "I don't know it."
Again his voice ceased; by its sound she knew that he was looking away,
toward the door. His face was sullen, quite still. Then he spoke again,
moving; his voice now had an overtone, unmirthful yet quizzical, at once
humorless and sardonic: "If I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of
time." (254)

Joe's silence seems to guide Joanna's questioning until eventually he must admit that if he is not black, his entire life has been a waste. It is, of course, impossible for Joe to know what race, or races, he is, but crucial to his identity is a sense of difference. Indeed, this vague sense of difference is all he can really claim to know.

The narrator presents this difference as something Joe recognizes as early as childhood, playing in the orphanage yard while the caretaker kept an eye on him, though he is incapable of articulating it: "With more vocabulary but no more age he might have thought *That is why I am different from the others: because he is watching me all the time* He accepted it" (138). Difference must necessarily be articulated through language in order to integrate it properly into knowledge, and for the young Joe, this difference is the insane Doc Hines watching him; this is the event that, as a child, prevents him from integrating himself into the community, and later in life he locates this difference in the realm of race or racial difference. As Kartiganer points out:

Joe's sense of difference then originates in Hines's mad obsessions, developing into an otherness that the children and Joe himself - like Hines, like the citizens of Jefferson many years later - articulate as the *possibility of blackness*. From these materials Joe weaves the pattern of an identity,

yet he will not give up its tenuousness: at once relying on that identity as a ground, an explanation for his sense of himself, yet refusing to accept it definitively, never wholly believing nor allowing others to believe in its validity. (emphasis mine 303)

For Joe, this sense of difference which began as a child is communicated through racial difference. But his attempt to provide himself with an identity through which others can know him ultimately fails, since it is an unstable identity and something which he himself does not thoroughly believe in. And yet, this does not stop the community of Jefferson from attempting to articulate Joe's identity as a racialized one (and little else). There is a curious dynamic between Joe's claims to possessing 'black blood', something that is not visibly apparent, and their readiness to believe his claim. Unlike Joanna, who greets Joe's claim that he is 'part nigger' with the question of "how do you know that?", the implication being she wants some kind of proof that would confirm and validate his statement, the community requires no such information. The mere belief that Joe's murder of Joanna is instigated because of his blackness seems to transcend any real inquiry into his history. The link between race and evil is so firmly planted in the community's mind that believing Joe is black is simply easier than believing he is anything else. In fact, despite what Kartiganer calls the "tenuousness" of the identity Joe presents to the community, they still place the label of 'nigger' on him in order to know him.

Becoming a 'Nigger'

In order for the citizens of Jefferson to come to terms with the information about Joe murdering Joanna, and the subsequent revelation of his blackness, they are required to discuss it:

Through the long afternoon they clotted about the square and before the jail - the clerks, the idle, the countrymen in overalls; the talk. It went here and there about the town, dying and burning again like a wind or a fire until the lengthening shadows the country people began to depart in wagons and dusty cars and the townspeople began to move supperward. Then the talk flared again, momentarily revived, to wives and families about supper tables in electrically lighted rooms and in remote hill cabins with kerosene lamps. (348-49)

What is perhaps most intriguing in this passage is not how the talk spreads like a wildfire throughout the town, but rather the way Faulkner constructs its spark and sprawl. He uses the individuals, starting with the law clerks directly related to Joe's case, and moves outward to the country folk upon whom Joe's case has no direct bearing, but who are still interested in it nonetheless. Everyone in Jefferson participates in the "talk", which gains a life of its own. Indeed, this "talk" cannot exist without the individuals who participate in its creation, but when created it becomes an entity unto itself, superseding the individuals who made it, finally guiding their actions and thoughts. But this is not simply an example of the nature of gossip, but a complex examination of the language and discourse of a community.

Richard Gray writes about Light that “in becoming more openly interested in how a society defines itself and its members through its rituals, allocates power and distributes rewards and punishments, Faulkner was only continuing an interest or obsession... with the inter-subjective nature of reality: the way we as individuals live both as part of and apart from society via speech... the terms of ‘social’ and ‘personal’ are matters of emphasis and perspective only” (179)⁹. In Gray’s construction of “reality” in Faulkner’s work, the individual is not only constructed through the symbolic realms of speech, but is inevitably also isolated. This is precisely Joe’s predicament; he avoids, or does not engage, symbolic representation in Jefferson since he does not commit to any definitive racial identity, but even as the community forces him to become a ‘nigger’, an identity he at one time lived, he is excluded from the community: for Joe, language alienates.

The next day, the community continues to discuss Joe’s story:

And on the next day, the slow, pleasant country Sunday... they told it again: “He don’t look any more like a nigger than I do. But it must have been the nigger blood in him. It looked like he had set out to get himself caught like a man might set out to get married... And they would not have suspected him then if it hadn’t been for a fellow named Brown, that the nigger used to sell whisky while he was pretending to be white man...

(349)

Joe does not appear to be a ‘nigger’, but must be; otherwise his actions would be inconceivable. His blackness provides a convenient reason for the horrors occurring in Jefferson, as well as a way to speak about them. Joe’s blackness, in fact, seems to supplant his deeds for the status of the greater crime: what the community insists is his

racial reality they also see as explanatory truth, implicitly suggesting that their earlier assumption of his whiteness is the result of a carefully orchestrated deception on Joe's part. As the town continues to discuss Joe, they speak about his brazen attitude: "he went into the barbershop like a white man, and because he looked like a white man they never suspected him... and [he] went right into a store and bought a new shirt and a tie and a straw hat, with some of the very money he stole from the woman he murdered" (349). Since Joe looks like a white man, he is free to move into areas where non-whites, presumably, could not enter. But his audacity in acting "like a white man" is particularly infuriating.

Throughout the entire passage in which the talk of the town is written, the change in Joe's identity in relation to Jefferson is brilliantly articulated. When he comes into town, he appears to be white, and his living as such is never questioned. But as the possibility of his blackness arises, he becomes a 'nigger'. More importantly, he is the worst kind of 'nigger': one who does not act like, or appear to be, one. While Joe attempts to reside outside the schemes through which individual identity is formed, and in so doing subverts the very idea of representing the self to others as is required through entry into the symbolic, he is finally denied this alternative space by the residents of Jefferson. It is as though the very nature of the symbolic/language cannot accommodate someone residing within the gaps of language, in this case within the gaps between racial definitions. This is perhaps made most evident in Gavin Stevens' lengthy speech in which he attempts to account for the nature of Joe's actions. Stevens rewrites Joe's history, ascribing a narrative to him that will encapsulate all the events in Joe's life, and which will provide causality to these events, something the town desperately reaches for:

“But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it... Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it. And it was the white blood which sent him to the minister...” (448). Each of Joe’s actions leading to and following the murder of Joanna are attributed to a particular race. It is worth noting that the more socially appropriate actions, like seeking redemption, are caused by his white blood while his black blood drives him to be evil, ultimately causing him to murder. But no action is the result of the mixture of racial bloods in his body, and as such Joe is placed into multiple racial roles or identities, as ‘evidenced’ by the way he acts¹⁰. Gavin Stevens continues his story:

Then I believe that the white blood deserted him for the moment. Just a second, a flicker, allowing the black to rise in its final moment and make him turn upon that on which he had postulated his final hope of salvation. It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life. (449)

Joe ultimately does not kill the Reverend Hightower, “his final hope of salvation”, because his “black blood” prevents him from doing so. Yet it is the very same black blood which compels Joe to turn against himself, preventing any possibility of concluding the murder of Joanna with some kind of decency or sanctification. It is his black blood that makes Joe a murderer and ultimately leads him to his demise. Like the rest of

Jefferson, Stevens struggles to understand Joe and to define his impact on the community, and he does so through creating a narrative that imposes order on seemingly random events, and the structural frame of this order - the principle upon which it is based - is that of race. Stevens' presentation of the antagonistic relationship of the white and black blood in Joe's body illustrates a fundamental need for the community to categorize race, and to emphasize racial difference as a crucial determining factor of individual identity.

James A. Snead writes that "...race enters Faulkner's texts as a practice whereby, through segregating a certain group of people from the category of "whiteness," Yoknapatawpha society finds the chief proof of its authority, integrity, and communal identity. Racial division, racial segregation, and the mythologies surrounding it, collectively try to outlaw all interracial contiguity, cohabitation, and consanguinity" (152)¹¹. Racial difference for Faulkner is not an explicit manifestation of some empirical, biological principle, but rather exists in the polyphony of characters who discuss it, desperately trying to develop some firm principle or idea which will explain and legitimate the arbitrary differences they rely upon to define their own identity. Indeed, more than being interested with examining racist acts per se, Light seems to be more interested with examining the community's construction of it. What is important in Stevens' reconstruction of Joe's life is not merely an explanation of the murder of Joanna Burden, but the reaffirmation of the racial principles which play such an integral part in the foundations of Jefferson. Not only is Joe ultimately segregated from the town by being made into a black man after his death, but even the possibility of an interracial history is denied Joe as he must be either white or black, but cannot be, or cannot live as, both. The talk, and Stevens' tale, all serve the same function: to attempt to explain that

which resides outside their communal identity, and consequently their language. It is the attempt to explain that which they cannot.

There is a unity to be found through the talk, as individuals engage each other and language, and implicitly rearticulate and reaffirm their shared beliefs and viewpoints. In the case of Jefferson, this unity resides in participating in a racist ideology, one that Joe could never be interpellated into since the expression of that ideology - the language through which it is communicated and realized - cannot thoroughly realize a figure like Joe.

The Impossibility of Racist Knowledge in Jefferson

Joe's apparent refusal to act like a 'nigger', and completely acknowledge the position the community places him in, as evidenced by Halliday's calling out to him, is infuriating to the entire community; it is what "made the folks so mad"¹². It creates a tension in the communal 'talk' about Joe, which desperately tries to assign him a place, or rather to force him into a place, or symbolic space, that already exists. There is, in effect, an unresolved aspect in the narrative this 'talk' creates about Joe: despite the community's insistence upon Joe being a 'nigger', neither he nor they can actually know whether or not he is black, and to make matters worse, he does not act like a 'nigger'. Consequently, those telling Joe's story cannot properly integrate his behaviour with their conceptions of how he should behave. As Gray suggests, the 'talk' in Light demonstrates, "the process by which different groups come together and try to explain what is for them the inexplicable: to accommodate an awkward historical reality to the language that supports and authenticates their way of life - that serves to confirm their

own interests. And... that language - and, with it, social relationships and systems of belief - can begin to change when faced with the assault of history" (181). What the arrival of Joe in Jefferson illustrates is how a community refuses to have its defining limitations stretched by an individual who exists outside those limitations. Joe's presence confronts the nature of racial identity and shows the residents of Jefferson how flawed their process of assigning individual identity to a racial type really is¹³. And yet, the very nature of the process of assigning a label to an individual, be that racial or of another type, is flawed. Snead points out:

Yoknapatawpha's major classifications - white/black, poor/rich, male/female - depend on an obsessive kind of polar thinking. The reality of the human beings thus classified remains absent. Faulkner's narratives mainly concern the effects of these classifications on human sensibilities, white and black, male and female, rich and poor: how can we ever know each other if our society works through a forced organization into distinct groupings? (154-55)

It is ultimately a paradox to apply these classification schemes on individuals, since in doing so the actual individual remains unknown. What should be simple and straightforward knowledge about the individuals/characters is subverted in Light: the reader is left, like the town of Jefferson, to wonder who Joe Christmas really is, and how, or even if, he fits into descriptive language¹⁴.

The figure of Joe Christmas represents for Jefferson, and the narrative, the clash of knowing and not knowing. It is made explicitly clear in the novel that Joe does not know his racial make-up, and it is precisely this lack of knowledge which haunts him and

leads to his demise¹⁵. And Joe's lack of self-knowledge extends to those around him, who repeatedly reflect on what they do not know about him. The narrator in Light articulates what Byron knew, did not know, and knows now about Joe:

This is *not* what Byron *knows* now. This is just what *he knew then*, what he heard and watched as it came to his knowledge. *None of them knew* there where Christmas lived and what he was actually doing behind the veil, the screen of his negro's job at the mill. Possibly *no one would ever have known* it if it had not been for the other stranger, Brown... even the ones who bought the whiskey *did not know* that Christmas was actually living in a tumble down negro cabin on Miss Burden's place, and that he had been living in it for more than two years. (emphasis mine 36)

Joe's entire existence is wrapped up in an "alternation of ignorance and knowledge" (Snead 158), and in this brief exposition of Joe's history in Jefferson, as provided by the narrator of Light through the perspective of Byron, lies hidden a complex mediation of authority and subject positions. Byron knows now, because of Brown, that Joe is actually a 'nigger', and that knowledge provides a conclusion to the murder of Miss Burden. His blackness provides an avenue through which her death can be understood and explained. If it was not for Brown, "possibly no one would ever have known" what Joe was concealing. Even those buying the whiskey, whom Byron assumes are closest to Joe, "did not know". Joe's blackness is a revelation for the community, the missing piece in their lack of knowledge about who he is, where he is, and what he is doing in Jefferson. Once Brown suggests Joe is black, the entire community accepts it as fact. But Joe is more than the black scapegoat for the white community: to read him as such denies the

way his existence threatens their structures of knowing, and the way he forces the community to confront the gaps in their understanding of the world. Beyond merely being a victim of an unjust and racist town, he embodies for the community their collective lack of knowledge. As Snead points out, "Light in August... treat[s] the relationship between language and knowledge. At question is, above all, what the town knows, what it thinks it knows, what it knows but must conceal, and finally what it can never know because that knowledge would imperil its ability to know anything" (159-60). The knowledge that they cannot afford to know, since it would crumble their already delicate structures of knowledge, is that their scheme of racial identification - which they rely upon to understand the world around them - is inherently adequate¹⁶.

To the community, Joe is an enigma. He is a mystery whose very presence taunts the community, urging them to define him. It would perhaps be surprising to suggest that Joe designs his own fate, precisely by ignoring any possible design to his life, but this is precisely what Kartiganer notes:

... Joe resides squarely within the structure of a racially inflected language which he speaks with considerable, and disturbing fluency, never seeming to doubt the hierarchy of values implicit to it. Within that language, sharing its biases, Joe can determine who he is, what place he occupies and what are the boundaries of his behaviour, however limited these may be by the specific, racially mixed identity which he insists on believing may be his. (304-05)

In order for Joe to find a place in Jefferson in which he can reside, or exist, he is required to participate in their language, and all of its racially coded meanings. But ultimately Joe

refuses to engage the language that would allow him a fixed position in that society, and he is capable of so doing because he insists upon his blackness while appearing white. This provokes those around him to try and force him into the worst possible position he could accurately claim to be him: that of not knowing what his background is. This is made evident when the young Joe confronts a black caretaker at the orphanage:

... he [Joe] said 'How come you are a nigger?' and the nigger said 'Who told you I am a nigger, you little white trash bastard?' and he says 'I aint a nigger' and the nigger says 'You are worse than that. You don't know what you are. And more than that, you wont ever know. You'll live and you'll die and you won't never know' and he says 'God aint no nigger' and the nigger says 'I reckon you ought to know what God is, because dont nobody but God know what you is.'" (383-84)

The young Joe recognizes the ways in which language, or more precisely labeling, work to signify the identity of an individual. He is aware of how skin color dictates an individual's place within the social realm. What this exchange with the caretaker foregrounds is the true nature of Joe's dilemma: he will never possess a solid, recognizable identity since he does not know what he is. He cannot participate in this scheme, and is denied even the horrific label of 'nigger', left to reside within the gaps of identity, simultaneously recognizing the socializing element of language, and demonstrating its incapability to integrate him, and his inability to integrate himself. As Gray points out, "Joe... is a subversive agent: an indeterminate figure whose indeterminacy, and whose willingness to bring that indeterminacy into issues, calls into question the fixities and definites, and the exclusions, of the communal language" (187).

As Joe's presence subverts the identity-imposing aspects of language, it is not surprising that the community responds with outrage. Faulkner presents in Joe a character who reveals the contradictions and difficulties in characterizing race, or any other aspect of identity, through binaries¹⁷. He exposes the arbitrariness of signifying practices, by having Joe be both black and white, and by having Joe not know his own history and refuse to acknowledge a singular identity. In doing so, Joe threatens to disintegrate the language of Jefferson. Snead succinctly notes that "Light depicts how Joe Christmas resists signification, while showing that we... cannot tolerate anything that does not signify" (161). Joe threatens the structure of the community, but rather than allow him to reside outside the symbolic as an other that simply cannot be accommodated by language, he is forced into their system. They, of course, provide him with the convenient label of 'nigger' which enters him into language, and constructs an identity for him through which he can be acknowledged and recognized¹⁸. But the communal outrage that Snead alludes to manifests itself in the castration and murder of Joe, the final act that literalizes the way the community uses language to position him.

The Traumatic Final Entry into Language

Faulkner describes the murder of Joe in graphic detail. When Percy Grimm catches Joe, order is finally returned to the community and to language, and Joe's origins are forced upon him as he dies:

For a long moment he [Joe] looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his

hips and loins the pent *black* blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his *pale* body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that *black* blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. (italics mine 464-65)

Joe's (black) blood pours onto the floor, and seems to carry with it the whole community. As Grimm murders him, Joe passes into the community's "memories forever and ever" and his very being is finally integrated into the community's collective conscience¹⁹. And because Joe is now finally a part of the community, the narrator suggests communal order has been achieved:

They are not to lose it [the memory of Joe and his story] in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. Again from the town, deadened a little by the walls, the scream of the siren mounted toward its unbelievable crescendo, passing out of the realm of hearing. (465)

Kartiganer suggests that "the description of his death sustains the otherness of his life, the transcendence of the very structure that has killed him" (310), and indeed it would seem that as Joe's life slips from his body, and enters the memory of the community, his presence will resonate in those identity-conferring structures that possessed no room or space for him. As his black blood spills from his body, the threat implicit in his being - that uncertain racial heritage so easily masked by his white facade - eliminates the threat

in him, and a peaceful future image of the community seems to surge up and replace the image of the castrated Joe bleeding to death. This strange juxtaposition of the pastoral with the horrific, the future community and Joe presently dying, provides an important scene in which the collapse of the individual into the community is carefully articulated.

In writing on the intersections of what is clinically known as trauma, and that more general term of community, Kai Erickson writes:

... one can speak of traumatized communities as something distinct from assemblies of traumatized persons... Sometimes the tissues of community can be damaged in much the same way as the tissues of mind and body... but even when that does not happen, traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to create a mood, an ethos - a group culture, almost - that is different from (and more than) the sum of the private wounds that make it up. Trauma, that is, has a social dimension. (185)²⁰

Erickson is writing about a specific event, and how the community situated around the event may be impacted by it. And yet, for Erickson, the traumatized community is not the same as a group of traumatized individuals. It is a particularly different way of conceptualizing trauma, in order to make such a statement:

The dictionary... defines trauma both as “a stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behavior” and as “the state or condition produced by such a stress or blow”... The historian... and the therapist... will naturally be interested in beginnings. But those are no more than details to everyone else (and not even very important ones at that), because

it is *how people react to them* rather than *what they are* that give events whatever traumatic quality they can be said to have. (184)

Erickson suggests the very nature of trauma is such that the results of the trauma seem to take precedence over the event itself in defining an event as traumatic. If, indeed, it is the reaction to an event that makes it traumatic rather than the event itself, and trauma possesses a uniquely social dimension in its experience, then the ways in which communities are traumatized can be rethought so as to emphasize their communal reaction. Said another way, and more relevantly, a community can have its shared bonds reinforced in their shared experience of a particular event, and that experience can be deemed as traumatic by the ways in which the community (that aggregation of individuals around the event) reacts to it. In this sense, Joe's arrival in Jefferson, and the strain he puts on their language, becomes a traumatic event. It is the reaction of the community to Joe in the wake of their inability to contain him, and not necessarily Joe himself, which gives his arrival in Jefferson its traumatic quality.

Because Joe cannot be represented through their language, they are left with no option but to label him as 'nigger' in an attempt to understand him. He threatens everything they know, particularly about race, but through their 'talk' they collaborate in their labeling, and attempt to move past the event of his arrival. Gray speaks of the community's resolve to deal with Joe:

Once Joe is captured, a fresh attempt is made to pin the label of 'nigger' on him, to tie him down to a particular... name and identity. This comes out, in the first instance, among the people of Mottstown, many of whom demand that Joe should be lynched. The demand is a horrifying one... but

it may not be so unexpected, given its source. For lynching, too, can be seen as part of the communal language: a tribal ritual accepted, it seems, even beyond the borders of Yoknapatawpha. Not just an act of violence, it is an act of collaboration: meant to underpin a whole series of categories, and so reassure the community, by putting a so-called 'nigger murderer' in his place. (186)

The call for lynching functions to create a community that desperately needs to expunge a traumatic event. In lynching Joe - in finally relegating this 'nigger' to his proper place - the community not only deals with the traumatic event by solidly fusing him into their language, but they also are able to move past it, implicitly together. As Erickson writes about the ways in which trauma can create community: "to describe people as traumatized is to say that they have withdrawn into a kind of protective envelope, a place of mute, aching loneliness, in which the traumatic experience is treated as a solitary burden that needs to be expunged by acts of denial and resistance. What could be less "social" than that?" (185-86). As the community labels Joe a 'nigger' they engage Erickson's "denial and resistance" quite literally, since they deny him his identity (that unknown racial heritage lurking beneath his white skin) and resist the multiple identities he could inhabit. And in this labeling of Joe, they are able to reaffirm what they would like to believe, and ignore what they cannot know. But even this labeling is not enough to secure Joe's place within their racist ideology. The community requires Joe's death to eliminate his resistance to their language.

After Grimm castrates Joe, he declares "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell" (464). This final act confirms Joe as a 'nigger' - all mystery about Joe's racial

make-up is removed: he is black - and Grimm, wearing his American military uniform, finally injects him into the racist linguistic structure which all along has been incapable of holding him. Joe's death means he can no longer resist representation in the social sphere: he will be what others say he is as he is no longer present to contest or resist. Indeed, it is only through death that Joe is capable of entering the language of Jefferson. As Fowler suggests, "Joe's death represents a long-delayed entry into the symbolic order. At last, Joe submits to the power of the symbolic, represented by Percy Grimm. The paradox is, as James M. Mellard eloquently explains, that one becomes a "subject-as-subject" only through castration; that "the drive toward subjectivity" "is always toward death" - lack, privation, the loss of the symbolic phallus" (87). Fowler reads Grimm's literal castration of Joe as his figurative submission to the Law of the Father, a necessary step in the process of entry into the symbolic. Until Joe submits to castration (both figurative and literal) he cannot live among those around him, and cannot be represented. While Faulkner is interested in stretching the boundaries of communal knowledge and identity formation, he clearly demonstrates that those boundaries are not completely elastic, nor can they be broken. Joe's subversion of the racist linguistic system of Jefferson ultimately does not destroy it or even redesign it. He does not find a place in it in which he can exist and consequently expand the system. Rather, he is subsumed by the system at the cost of his life. Both Jefferson, and language, in Light are capable of tolerating only easily categorized figures, and cannot bend to do otherwise.

Erickson writes:

... traumatic experiences work their way so thoroughly into the grain of the affected community that they come to supply its prevailing mood and

temper, dominate its imagery and its sense of self, govern the way its members relate to one another. The point to be made here is not that calamity serves to strengthen the bonds linking people together - it does not, most of the time - but that the shared experience becomes almost like a common culture, a source of kinship. (190)

After Joe's death, as evidenced by the future, pastoral scene, the community finds unity dwelling upon the narrative that is Joe's life. This is not a vision of a utopian future, but rather the only possible response by the community in the wake of a traumatic event. The memory of Joe, which "will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful", and its impact on their contemplation of "old disasters and new hopes" is not necessarily an image of cultural improvement and movement towards a language that embraces all individuals, but rather illustrates how Joe's presence in Jefferson has been a "shared experience", and the memory of him has become a "common culture". The narrator in Jefferson does not suggest that the community will resolve to never make the same mistakes, but rather that it will cling to memory and shared experience as a traumatized community, repeatedly recycling through the narrative of Joe Christmas. Joe's life and death - indeed his entire existence in Jefferson - like a trauma that affects a community, has woven itself into the cultural fabric of Jefferson "forever and ever".

* * *

When it is revealed that Old Doc Hines is Joe's maternal grandfather, Hines confesses to taking Joe away and placing him in an orphanage. Hines exclaims:

"Yes. Old Doc Hines took him. God give old Doc Hines his chance and so old Doc Hines give God his chance too. So out of the mouths of little children God used His will. The little children hollering Nigger! Nigger! at him in the hearing of God and man both, showing God's will. And old Doc Hines said to God 'But that aint enough. Them children call one another worse than nigger' and God said 'You wait and you watch, because I aint got the time to waste neither with this world's sluttishness and bitchery. I have put the mark on him and now I am going to put the knowledge..." (371)

The infant Joe, who Hines claims possesses black blood, deserves to be punished, and to be labeled as a 'nigger'. But for Hines, racism is not punishment enough: Joe deserves something worse. The black blood in Joe, which Hines reads as God's mark is not enough, and Hines is required to imbue him with the alleged knowledge of his black blood to thoroughly punish him. Joe, the community, and the reader are never fully certain about his racial make-up, and it is this not-knowing which becomes the tragedy of the novel. Faulkner himself insisted Joe's inability to know his history is the novel's central tragedy:

I think that was his tragedy - he didn't know what he was, and so he was nothing. He deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn't know what he was. That was his tragedy, that to me was the tragic, central idea of the story - that he didn't know what he was, and there was

no way possible in life for him to find out. Which to me is the most tragic condition a man could find himself in - not to know what he is and to know that he will never know. (Gwynn and Blotner 72)²¹

Faulkner's insistence on Joe's unknown racial heritage being the central motif of Light highlights the importance of knowledge in the novel: this is a work about the importance of knowing oneself and one's history. And yet, knowledge of oneself in the Faulknerian narrative is crucial to defining one's identity, a process that is implicitly, and necessarily social. What Faulkner presents in Light is how the individual is inextricably bound up in that social network of others, and thus individual identity is manifested through others. Joe is a subversive character who simultaneously addresses the linguistic and social concern that Faulkner repeatedly returns to, namely, the problematized nature of applying binary categories to individual identity. And through Joe, Faulkner articulates the complicity of individuals in narrative structure and language, and examines the implicit threat presented by those who are capable of existing outside these structures.

When Faulkner suggests that the tragedy of Light is Joe's not-knowing, it belies the complex implications of this. Joe's lack of a firm racial background prevents him from ever entering the community on his own terms. They cannot, and will not, recognize the shortcomings of language - shortcomings that inevitably result in racist practices - and consequently they are never capable of articulating a Joe that will incorporate his potentially multiracial heritage. In order to discuss him, and thus impose an identity on him, they are required to articulate him as either white or black, but since there always remains the possibility of his black blood, he necessarily becomes a 'nigger'.

Finally, it is only through subjecting him to this racialized, and degrading, term, and eventually taking his life, that he ironically achieves subjectivity.

Chapter Two: Inventing the Historical, and Traumatic, Event: Absalom, Absalom!

In Light in August, the community of Jefferson attempts to inscribe a racialized narrative onto the body of the mysterious Joe Christmas, but inevitably fails as Joe denies any singular racial representation. The community, in an effort to maintain its own system of signification, is required to murder Joe in order to eliminate his resistance and to assign him a convenient label. What is foregrounded in Faulkner's examination of their communal narrative of Joe is the traumatic inability of language to completely contain those who possibly occupy multiple racial positions. But where Light in August examines the inadequacy of language, Absalom, Absalom! explores the problematized signification of narrative as it fails to achieve its desire meaning or intention. In the Faulknerian examination of narrative and history, the inability of narrative to thoroughly communicate history, or somehow to access the past, is traumatic.

As Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon sit in their room at Harvard discussing the tale of Thomas Sutpen, Quentin insists his grandfather was overwhelmed in hearing Sutpen's story from Sutpen's own mouth, suggesting that Grandfather Compson "was saying 'Wait wait for God's sake wait' about like you [Shreve] are until finally he did stop and back up and start over with at least some regard for cause and effect even if none for logical sequence and continuity" (199)¹. Quentin here presents his grandfather as the victim of a narrative process gone awry, so completely possessed by its own desire to narrate - to dilate the narrative beyond its original intention - that it loses any drive towards meaning. Like Shreve, Grandfather Compson is forced to try to develop his own interpretation of Sutpen's tale. Perhaps the same could always be said

for any listener or reader of a given narrative. Peter Brooks suggests that “to the literary analyst, this may imply that the reader, like Quentin and Shreve, will always take over the text, both reading and (re)writing it to his own design, finding in it ‘what will suffice’ to his own hermeneutic need and desire” (305)². Indeed, this very same desire to discover, or at least to impose, some explanation on narrative is repeatedly spoken about in Absalom!. As Quentin’s father tells him, “you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs” (80). For Mr. Compson, as history is narrativized, accuracy becomes crucial to the narrator who endlessly replays events and details in order to be certain what is being conveyed is actually what happened. And yet, after all the fact-checking and verification is completed, all that is left are the words, which are themselves hollow and meaningless, incapable of properly and thoroughly capturing the past, or of conveying history. But in regard to Sutpen’s legend, a source of curiosity and amazement for the Compson family, there is something fundamentally untellable: the history of Sutpen, which has become narrativized by various Compson elders and is now being re-told by Quentin, has been checked and re-thought multiple times, but something at the very heart of Sutpen’s story does not make sense and cannot be told.

Quentin’s father tells him his version of the Sutpen story (which he heard from his own father, who in turn heard it from Sutpen). Despite, or perhaps because, of this considerable narrative distance from the original source, Mr. Compson suggests:

It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they don't 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, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames... performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable - Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old 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... (80)

In this lengthy passage, Mr. Compson literalizes the nature of the Compson 'work' on the Sutpen legend, as they "exhume" the legend which, like old paper that is "faded and falling to pieces", is fragile and must be handled gently. For the Compsons, Sutpen's story becomes a narrative to be handed down from generation to generation, within which there exists some meaning, however obscure, which will order the past events out at Sutpen's Hundred and provide them with some kind of linearity and meaning: history exists between individuals - it is a collaborative effort between the speaker and listener - who attempt to place it in the present in the form of narrative, a discursive form which carries with it the ultimate aim of recuperating the past. But even the most careful attempts to recreate history and to 'know' those involved, inevitable fail as there is always "something missing".

As Quentin and Shreve work together to create their own version of the Sutpen story (removed three-fold from the original source), they speculate upon a showdown between Sutpen's two sons, Henry and Charles Bon. It is, to be sure, a racialized showdown, as Henry goes to stop his half-brother Bon (who possesses black blood) from marrying their sister Judith. What Quentin and Shreve suggest is that at the heart of Sutpen's story - what they appear to recognize that other members of the Compson family could not - is a fear of miscegenation as would be realized in the Bon-Judith relationship. Race, for Quentin and Shreve, provides a reason for Sutpen's downfall, and ultimately supplies the Sutpen tale with that component Mr. Compson felt was always "missing". It is in Quentin's story that the difficulties his forefathers experienced in dealing with the Sutpen story come to the foreground, and these difficulties, according to Quentin and Shreve, are immediately bound to racial difference. What Quentin's reworking of this story suggests is that race is somehow implicitly linked with narrative, in a way that necessarily affects form and historical understanding. Said another way, it is the link between race and narrative that is so difficult to understand, as though there is something untransmittable within this link that inevitably impedes understanding for the listener. For Quentin, it is within the interconnectedness of history, race and narrative that the meaning of Sutpen's story is finally found. And this realization is nothing short of traumatic.

The Problematic Referentiality of Narrative

Peter Brooks suggests that the final purpose of all narratives is to better understand the past in a fashion that will fuse the past with the present by suggesting

precisely how the past has led to the present: “the recovery of the past - which I take to be the aim of all narrative - may not succeed in Absalom, Absalom!, if by the recovery of the past we mean its integration within the present through a coherent plot fully predicated and understood as past” (311). For Brooks, all narratives are fundamentally concerned with accessing the past, but in Absalom! this narrative concern fails, and the past whose recovery is *attempted* cannot be integrated into the present. As Brooks continues:

Yet the attempted recovery of the past makes known the continuing history of past desire as it persists in the present, shaping the project of telling...

The seemingly universal compulsion to narrate the past in Absalom, Absalom!, and to transmit its words, may speak both of an unmasterable past and of a dynamic narrative present dedicated to an interminable analysis of the past. Faulkner’s present is a kind of tortured utopia of unending narrative dialogue informed by desire of a “revelatory knowledge”. That knowledge will never come, yet that desire never will cease to activate the telling voices. (311-12)

The desire for a knowledge that will order and give meaning to all elements of a given narrative, or more specifically the past, as part of some master structure that will finally endow them with hermeneutic value relative to the present, propels narrative forward towards conclusion. Brooks suggests that Faulkner reworks the past through the present, but in the various reconstructions of Sutpen’s design that the reader is presented with, there is always something lacking. And precisely because of this lack in the story, the various tellings and analyses of it are “interminable”, as though the repeated retelling could fill that lack, or master the “unmasterable” nature of Sutpen’s past. It must be

wondered, though, why the past of Absalom! is so impossible to integrate into the present: what is it about Sutpen's story, as reconstructed by Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson and especially Quentin that makes it so difficult to understand? More specifically, it must be wondered whether the problematic nature of retelling Sutpen's history lies in the content of the story, in the act of narration, or within the nature of narrative itself.

Brooks locates a kind of arbitrariness at the center of the act of narration, a center that ultimately forces the privileging of narrating itself, as opposed to any derivable, climactic meaning: "... the ultimate subject of any narrative is its narrating, that narrative inevitably reveals itself to be a Moebius strip where we unwittingly end up on the plane from which we began... Narrative plots may be no more - but of course also no less - than a variety of syntax which allows the verbal game - the dialogue, really, to go on" (305). If the final subject of all narratives is the process of narration, then the other aim of narrative that Brooks suggests is foremost - the recuperation of history - must necessarily be subjugated to the complex syntactic webs which are weaved to create narrative. As Brooks goes on, "origin and endpoint - and perforce, genealogy and history - are merely as-if postulations ultimately subject to the arbitrary whims of the agency of narration, and of its model in readership" (305). The reconstruction of history is ultimately controlled by the "arbitrary whims" of the narrator, who will inevitable be caught up in her own desire to continue the narrative process. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the exchange between Quentin and Shreve, who desperately and repeatedly attempt to reconstruct Sutpen's story.

The relationship between narrator and reader/listener, as embodied in Quentin and Shreve, demonstrates the reciprocal ways in which narrativized history is constructed, but fails to find that which it desperately seeks. Together, they blur the binary division of speaker and listener:

They stared - glared - at one another, their voices (it was Shreve speaking, though, save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least, to Shreve) shades too, quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporizing breath. (243)

Quentin and Shreve become indistinguishable from one another, as he who 'knows' what happened to the Sutpens (Quentin) effortlessly merges with he who is removed by physical distance and time, and thus can only speculate (Shreve). Together they create a material narrative out of the intangible fragments of stories and tales carefully collected by Quentin and laid out in their dormitory. It is their shared consciousness that allows them to engage simultaneously narrative's need for unending dialogue, and still impose a meaning on its construction, as the mysterious figure of Sutpen, and the historical legacy he represents, is brought to life in their intimate back-and-forth retelling of his story. Yet,

despite their work, the past presented in Absalom! “remains unmasterable” and is never fully recovered, suggesting there is something fundamentally amiss in Sutpen’s story that prevents it from being fully integrated into their present, collective consciousness. In examining the passage above, Brooks remarks that it “shows us how narration can become fully dialogic, centerless, a transaction across what may be a referential void - filled perhaps only with phantasies from the past - yet a transaction that creates, calls into being, a necessary hermeneutic fiction” (304). The exchange between Quentin and Shreve is necessarily without center, their historical work a process of reference that lacks a referent.

Valdes states “‘reference’ is the activity of calling attention to something or to some state of affairs as relevant to the context at hand. ‘Referent’ [on the other hand] is that object which is called to the recipient’s attentions as being relevant” (618)³. If all narratives are a process of reference, then presumably the referent which is supposed to be conveyed is some hermeneutic interpretation. As Valdes goes on, a “semantic problem arises with non-ostensive reference in written language and can be examined at the level of the sentence and at the level of the text” (618). The system of language always contains the potential for reference to be problematized, and Absalom! reaches the pinnacle of narrative dialogue as it is a story that seems to never arrive at a definite, or absolute, hermeneutic meaning. Absalom! seems to be repeated dialogue, endlessly cycling through the same basic story, but with new information added by each speaker, all of whom cannot, ultimately, make sense of that which haunts them. It is the enactment of the referential process of history that becomes stuck in the referential process - the narrative - and its inability to escape out of this process prevents it from ever accessing its

referent. Yet despite, or perhaps, because the narrative of Absalom! is stuck in a “referential void” where the reconstruction of history is repeated, seemingly without direction, it is plagued by “phantasies of the past”. In the various reconstructions of the Sutpen legacy, and particularly in the case of Quentin, the past appears repeatedly, but is incomprehensible and seems to take the form of a repressed memory that bubbles through to consciousness⁴. Indeed, the psychically haunting past in Absalom! seems to literalize the nature of trauma theory, as examined in the work of Cathy Caruth.

The Traumatic Narrative

In discussing how Freud conceptualizes the trauma of an accident as revolving around the delayed - yet compelling and recurring - return of the figure of the accident itself, Caruth notes, “the accident... as it emerges in Freud and is passed on through other trauma narratives, does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility. What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event, but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (6)⁵. The traditional conception of trauma has always required considering the image of the traumatic event, which returns repeatedly to plague the victim’s psyche. Caruth’s model of trauma locates at the center of the phenomenon the victim’s unknowingness or inability to fully comprehend the traumatic event itself. Like Quentin and Shreve who desperately attempt to know the past, and inevitably fail, the trauma victim finds himself caught up in a narrative which seeks to convey the traumatic event as its referent, but cannot. As Caruth goes on to point out, “the story of the accident thus refers us, indirectly, to the unexpected reality - the locus of

referentiality - of the traumatic story” (6). At the heart of the traumatic narrative lies the event itself, but the trauma itself is unknowable. And since the traumatic narrative can never signify its origin, it repeatedly circles around the referent that can never fully be integrated into consciousness. For Caruth this has very significant implications for the construction of history through narrative. She suggests that “the possibility that reference is indirect, and that consequently we may not have direct access to others’, or even our own, histories seems to imply the impossibility of access to other cultures and hence of any means of making political or ethical judgments” (10). Caruth’s writing of trauma theory as a model through which history can be read does not allow for a simplification of historical approaches, nor does it insist upon the complete and total inaccessibility of history. Trauma theory, as developed here, is particularly relevant when considering the *workings* of history, or more specifically, the individual trying to develop a relationship to his/her history. She suggests one of the primary benefits of trauma theory in this context is “that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is no longer based on simple models of experience and reference)” (11). And to be sure, history in Absalom! is not presented as a straightforward process.

In writing on narrative representations of history, Fredric Jameson writes that “History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its ‘ruses’ turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intentions. But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force” (102)⁶. For Jameson, History is that force which seeks to oppress the individual and to eliminate mass action in its effort to maintain hegemonic

ideals, always concealing its workings: History, like the traumatic event, can never be fully known but is felt “through its effects” - narratives that approach, but never fully access, the historical event. Kai Erickson notes the necessary link between trauma theory and understanding history, and articulates how trauma theory provides a model for examining the “effects” of history:

The historian who wants to know where a story starts, like the therapist who needs to identify a precipitating cause in order to deal with the injury it does, will naturally be interested in beginnings. But those are no more than details to everyone else (and not even very important ones at that), because it is *how people react to them* rather than *what they are* that give events whatever traumatic quality they can be said to have. The most violent wrenchings in the world, that is to say, have no clinical standing unless they harm the workings of a mind or body, so it is the *damage done* that defines and gives shape to the initial event, the *damage done* that gives it its name. (184-85)⁷

Erickson’s formulation of trauma insists upon a privileging of the “damage done” by the traumatic event, rather than the event itself. Indeed, an event is defined as traumatic not by the event itself, but rather by its aftermath. History and trauma are both known through their effects since the historical or traumatic event is subordinated in terms of accessibility, and to some extent importance, to the narratives which seek to claim it. History as traumatic becomes a particularly useful analogy when considering how both are known through their effects, and it is the reaction of the survivors of trauma (or history) that defines the event (or history) as traumatic. The narrative structure of

Absalom! seeks to recreate the Sutpen legacy, and demonstrates the traumatic nature of history.

In examining the epistemology of the multiple narratives that comprise Absalom!, Brooks locates two currents in the novel. The first is what he calls “documentary evidence” (297), that works as the proairetic code that Barthes suggests traces the events, that is the plot, of the novel. Working in conjunction with the proairetic code, though, is the (secondary) hermeneutic code that “concerns the questions and answers that structure a story, their suspense, partial unveiling, temporary blockage, eventual resolution... which we work through toward what is felt to be, in classical narrative, the revelation of meaning that occurs when the narrative sentence reaches full predication” (Brooks 19). In Absalom! plot works in conjunction with meaning, however obscured this meaning may be, to create the narrative of Sutpen’s legacy. As each narrator in Absalom! takes a turn in recreating what happened at Sutpen’s Hundred, more information is revealed to the reader, and the *meaning* of the story is finally reached. Plot in Absalom! literally is meaning or, said another way, the unfolding of plot is inseparable from the quest for meaning. For example, Brooks reads the five tombstones at Sutpen’s Hundred as symbolizing the fate of the characters they are designed for, but locates a mystery in the metonymic trope of the tombstones, “the aberrant and enigmatic text here - hence the clue - is the fourth tombstone, that of Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon (Charles Bon’s child by the octoroon woman), who looks white but chooses blackness: who takes a black wife... and in fact has black ancestry in both his mother *and* his father, though we do not yet know this” (297-98). The tombstones function here as a kind of literal metonymy, linking family members together in their death and hinting at a mysterious relationship in

the tombstone of Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon. Here in the graveyard lies the mysterious hermeneutic of race, a meaning to the story that is provided only by Quentin and Shreve as they cycle through this story again. Plot, here, is constructed entirely upon race or racial difference. This is exemplified in the confrontation between Judge Hamblett and this racially enigmatic Bon, as Hamblett reprimands Bon for his actions: ““that you, I say, a white man, a white---’... and if already too late, as if Hamblett’s own voice had waked him at last or as if someone had snapped his fingers under his nose and waked him, he looking at the prisoner now but saying ‘white’ again even while his voice died away as if the order to stop the voice had been shocked into short circuit, and every face in the room turned toward the prisoner as Hamblett cried, ‘*What are you? Who are where did you come from?*’” (165). As Hamblett seeks to impose sentence, the narrative he constructs necessarily requires Saint-Valery Bon to be white. And yet, Saint-Valery Bon is not completely white, and Hamblett recognizes this, preventing him from realizing any definitive penalty and forcing him to speculate on this Bon’s racial heritage. Race here is presented as a process of reference, which falls apart in the figure of Saint-Valery Bon, who seems ‘white’ but is shown as existing outside the signification process. Like Joe Christmas in Light In August, Saint-Valery Bon forces language (a necessarily racialized signification process), and consequently meaning, to degenerate. And as Hamblett loses the ability to signify in racial terms, he becomes caught in the process, unable to move forward with his narrative, and is seemingly left with no option other than to demand that this Bon reveal his racial identity: this, rather than the punishment, becomes the hermeneutic of Hamblett’s narrative. Further, it is this trope of race, in conjunction with history, which through the various narratives of Sutpen’s story

demonstrates the lack of referentiality of history itself. It is the mystery of race which provides imprints Absalom! with meaning. If history is accessible only through narratives, and their relationship can be considered analogous to how trauma is known, race seems to be the historical (or traumatic) event of the novel.

A Racialized Narrative

In his essay “Race, History and Technique in Absalom, Absalom!”, Frederick R. Karl writes that “at its core, the novel focusses on attitudes towards race which themselves determine the outcome of the book, which fuel and nourish narrative... In one sense, what we are claiming is that race *has been absorbed into technique*” (209-10)⁸. The issue of race is so firmly embedded in the narrative process, that it has become part of its narrative technique, suggesting that as meaning is inseparable from the act of narration, race too is inseparable from the narrative approaches to history in the novel: narrative is composed of the narrator’s desire to maintain the act of narration and the listener’s desire for meaning, both of which are driven, in Absalom!, by race. Indeed, Karl notes a similarity between how Faulkner constructs history and race:

If history is subjective, as much speculation as fact, then race is part of that same mind-set; all of it intensified by the particularities of transmission.

Racial matters, then, are indistinguishable from narrative sequences, for each transmission of information derives from someone with a racial view different from the one receiving it... race, then, like history, becomes inseparable from telling... It is, therefore, an approximation in language of

what is unreachable; and, therefore, a perfect transmitter of ideas of race as they rush from one generation to another. (213-15)

Race, like history, is always constructed, and involving the same interplay of desires, the same push-and-pull between the speaker and listener, to eventually impose a meaning on its ambiguous nature. Race and history are difficult to locate in the novel: they exist, and are continually approximated through narratives, but are never accessed in their entirety. As each character transmits a story of Sutpen, they alter the actual narrative, and their version carries a kind of racialized weight which maintains the story. Said another way, somewhere within the psyches of the characters presenting their different recapitulations of the Sutpen legacy lie history and race, bound to each other in their recession from both the teller and the listener. The ultimate fallibility of language to capture history, and by implication race, is demonstrated by Faulkner through the various characters' constructions of race or racial difference, which despite its haunting nature, can never be explained.

Caruth, in discussing the wounded psyche of the trauma survivor and his perpetual, though always failing, narrativized return to the event, suggests that the essence of these stories requires the listener to be particularly attentive: "it is this plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken... that resonates in different ways... and which... constitutes the new mode of reading and of listening that both the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand" (9). Caruth suggests the traumatic event functions in narratives not only through words, but also through silences which infuse its textualized nature. These are not merely silences for the sake of

quietness, but rather express what language, or more specifically words, cannot convey. As Karl says, “meaning or history - and indirectly race - should be the culmination of language, but turn out to be embedded in silences between words, in space between lines, in seams between narrators” (214). The difficulty in shaping history in an understandable fashion is mocked in the design of Charles Bon, and is illustrated most cleverly in the exchange between Quentin and Shreve where, assuming the voice of Bon’s mother’s lawyer who seeks compensation from Sutpen for their ended marriage, they reduce Sutpen’s life to a financial statement:

Today he finished robbing a drunken Indian of a hundred miles of virgin land, val. 25,000. At 2:31 today came out of swamp with final plank for house. val. in conj. with land 40,000. 7:52 p.m. today married. Bigamy threat val. minus nil. unless quick buyer. Not probably. Doubtless conjoined with wife same day. Say 1 year and then with maybe the date and the hour too: Son. Intrinsic val. possible though not probably forced sale of house & land plus val. crop. Say 10 years, one or more children. Intrinsic val. forced sale house & improved land plus liquid assets minus children’s share. Emotional cal. 100% time increase yearly for each child plus intrinsic val. plus liquid assets plus working acquired credit... (241)

Forcing Sutpen’s history into a series of easily quantifiable events - each economically, and thus logically, linked to one another - functions as an almost humorous moment in a text which maintains above all else the impossibility of knowing history. But the mathematical nature of this passage demonstrates a desire for understanding that supersedes language. It is an extreme example of the need for plotting in order to impose

some relevant meaning. By arriving at some dollar amount that could be counted as compensation for all of Sutpen's wrongs, the lawyer could impose a meaning on the events, however superficial and unstable that meaning may be. But even this attempt at signification fails, as the possibility of Sutpen having a daughter interferes with the lawyer's plan to such an extent that he cannot continue: "... and here maybe with the date too: *Daughter* and you could maybe even have seen the question mark after it and the other words even: *daughter? daughter? daughter?* trailing off not because thinking trailed off, but on the contrary thinking stopping right then, backing up a little spreading like when you lay a stick across a trickle of water, spreading and rising slow all around him in whatever place it was..." (241). At the realization of the presence of a daughter, the lawyer's thinking does not trail off but rather stops suddenly, as though her presence cannot be integrated into his thought scheme about Sutpen. And the lawyer cannot make her a logical conclusion to the sequence of events, which would allow him to forget her, but rather his thinking dwells on her and envelops him. To a certain extent, the lawyer's difficulty with reconstructing history seems to exist because history here is a traumatic experience, or said another way, the effects of the recognition of history's inaccessibility here mimic those of the traumatic event. But history is inextricably intertwined with race, and like the traumatic nature of history, and its lack of meaning, race too seems to defy language.

In Rosa Coldfield's narration of the events at Sutpen's Hundred to Quentin, she suggests it is: "*Clytie who in the very pigmentation of her flesh represented that debacle which had brought Judith and me to what we were and which had made of her (Clytie) that which she declined to be just as she had declined to be that from which its purpose*

had been to emancipate her, as though presiding aloof upon the new, she deliberately remained to represent to us the threatful portent of the old" (126). The visual phenomenon that is Clytie's skin color - that "debacle" that is the mulatto Sutpen - provides for Rosa the final reason why she and Judith had been brought to Sutpen's home, and maintains the nearness, and danger, of history⁹. Clytie is Sutpen's daughter, and is half-black, an important narrative clue hinted at early in the novel, but not fully developed until later. As Brooks writes:

Clytie's identity opens the possibility of other part-Negro Sutpen children and alerts the narrators (and readers) to the significant strain of miscegenation; it also sets a model of narrative repetition which will allow Quentin and Shreve to see how Henry and Bon will be acting out Sutpen's script... It is Quentin - the narratee become narrator - who will eventually be able to postulate the essential discovery: that Charles Bon was also Sutpen's child, and that he, too, was part Negro. The source of that postulation... is the discovery of a certain formal pattern of the crossing of categories: Clytie's Sutpen face with its Negro pigmentation, the very design of debacle. (299)

The figure of Clytie demonstrates the undermining of Sutpen's "design" by miscegenation, and also provides Quentin with the final narrative clue that Bon was part black¹⁰. In short, all the plot points seem to direct Quentin, and the reader, to some ultimate hermeneutic involving race. But Rosa's treatment of Clytie's mixed heritage - and ultimately race - despite its influence on Quentin, is significantly different from how he conceptualizes the effect of racial difference on Sutpen's story. She is, to be sure,

horrified at the prospect of miscegenation, as evidenced by her proclamation that in her childhood she had been “taught... not only to instinctively fear her [Clytie] and what she was, but to shun the very objects she had touched” (112). And because race for Rosa is so easily categorized - blacks are unquestionably inferior to whites - she has a complete and easily accessible framework through which she can understand and conceptualize racial difference.

Perhaps not surprisingly, since race and narrative are inseparable in Absalom!, it is the figure of Quentin who struggles the most with race. He is, in the novel, the “narratee become narrator”: he is that character who has learnt Sutpen’s story alongside the reader, and he is that character who will supply the narrative with the missing component which will simultaneously complete the plot and endow it with meaning. It is Quentin who struggles the most with race, and his role in the novel is to reconstruct the narrative of others, while incorporating his own information, to develop a coherent “plot” of Sutpen’s design that is infused with some reason for all its events. But Quentin’s reconstruction is not merely a parroting of what others have said, with his own experience provided as a narrative supplement, but rather a complex negotiation of tradition, history, and the revelatory information he experiences first-hand to create a new and separate narrative. As Karl says:

Narrative strategies... have centralized the key sensibility in Quentin, and that is precisely where Faulkner has located the racial dilemma of the novel. For the others, race is not so difficult to work through: for Sutpen it counts mainly as something that cannot upset his grand design to establish himself; for Judith Sutpen, it does not seem a dominant factor - she lives

with Clytie, would probably marry Bon... and dies nursing Bon's son; for Henry, race becomes significant only when Bon insists on marrying Judith - otherwise he accepts a half-Negro sister in Clytie and he embraces Bon as a friend. (216)

Unlike the other characters in the novel, Quentin possesses a more complicated attitude towards the historical narrative of the Sutpen family, and to race.

When Quentin attends Harvard in The Sound and the Fury, he remarks:

When I first came East I kept thinking You've got to remember to think of them as colored people not niggers, and if it hadn't happened that I wasn't thrown with many of them, I'd have wasted a lot of time and trouble before 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 realised that a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among. (86)¹¹

Where Rosa lingers upon the visual aspects of race - the biological manifestation of racial difference - Quentin moves away from the physical to the behavioural. He necessarily complicates race, and moves it from the realm of the absolute (and thus easily defined) to something more intangible and vague (and thus more ambiguous). And it is precisely this complicated attitude towards race that prevents him from fully integrating the racialized element of the Sutpen narrative - what he will derive as its hermeneutic - into his consciousness. Like a traumatic event, he endlessly circles around the issue of race, and all of its historical implications here, never fully understanding its construction, and what

that construction finally signifies to him. Narrative, history, and race all culminate in the figure of Quentin, who desperately seeks to understand, but is doomed to never do so.

A Personal Trauma

Karen Ann Butery locates Quentin's interest in the Sutpen story in his desire for his sister, incest being a central motif of The Sound and the Fury. Butery writes that Quentin's "fascination with the part of the Sutpen legend that corresponds to his dilemma testifies to his unabated self-hate. Quentin puts himself through exquisite torture as he feverishly re-creates the history of the Henry-Charles-Judith triangle, and thus revitalizes the events of his own past. That Henry did fulfill the code, that he did shoot Charles even *before* Judith was compromised, in spite of the fact that Charles was Henry's brother and beloved friend, magnifies Quentin's failure" (218)¹². Butery is of course implicitly speaking about The Sound and the Fury, and Quentin's obsession with his inability to prevent his sister Caddy from losing her virginity, and his further failure to confront her suitor Dalton Ames, as he believes he should¹³. Quentin's fascination with the triangle of Henry-Charles-Judith lies essentially in the figure of Henry, who in Quentin's reconstruction of the past was everything he is not. The irony is that Quentin's desired glorification of Henry fails when Quentin finds a decrepit Henry hiding at Sutpen's Hundred waiting to die. As Butery suggests, "Quentin needs to believe that Henry Sutpen is a hero, the epitome of southern gentleman who defended his sister's honor. Instead, he sees an emaciated living cadaver, the son of a sadist, thief, and murderer who is hiding from the law, is guilty of fratricide, and has destroyed his own, his brother's, and his sister's lives for the sake of corrupted southern ideals" (220). The figure of Henry

represents for Quentin not just the failure of an idealized character, but also the failure of the entire southern way of life. The southern past of chivalry and honor, as projected onto the figure of Henry is a lie, and it is this (its lack of existence) that returns to haunt Quentin at Harvard. It is the “death-in-life presence of Henry Sutpen [that] dramatizes the degeneration of the southern myth” (Butery 220) that plagues Quentin’s psyche, like a traumatic event, a story that whether “waking or sleeping it was the same and would be the same forever as long as he lived” (Faulkner 298).

This meeting of Henry Sutpen, hidden and wasting away in that dark house comes back repeatedly to Quentin, who is forced to relive it again and again:

And you are-----?

Henry Sutpen.

And you have been here-----?

Four years.

And you came home-----?

To die. Yes.

To die?

Yes. To die.

And you have been here-----?

Four years.

And you are-----?

Henry Sutpen. (298)

This beautifully structured passage in which Quentin’s interrogation of Sutpen becomes an event with no beginning or ending, but which must necessarily be repeatedly cycled

through, demonstrates Quentin's psyche desperately attempting to come to terms with their meeting. This event, or rather the cycling through of this traumatic event, displays a fundamental inability on Quentin's behalf to grasp what this meeting means to him, particularly since this exchange is done in retrospect. As Caruth writes, "for history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (18). History, and what Henry Sutpen means to Quentin (both as an idea, and as a living, tangible cadaver) does indeed have a reference - there is ultimate meaning behind it - but this reference remains inaccessible, and it is this inaccessibility that the nature of history, the southern myth as enacted by Quentin's reconstruction of Henry's virtue and honor, for Quentin, becomes traumatic. Caruth goes on to suggest that "to put it somewhat differently, we could say that the traumatic nature of history means that events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others" (18). And above all else, history in Absalom! is a collaborative effort as exemplified in Quentin's relation to the past.

In the opening pages of Absalom, Absalom!, Quentin is described as having always lived with stories of the past, which have always existed in the deep recesses of his consciousness, seemingly without origin or temporal location. They have simply always been there: "Quentin had grown up with that; the mere names were interchangeable and myriad. His childhood was full of them; his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not an entity, he was a commonwealth" (7). His very identity is bound up with his cultural past, and is seemingly inseparable from it¹⁴. Indeed, his inaction in relation to his sister is seemingly

replaced with Henry's story, as though his perpetual reliving of Henry's actions will somehow compensate for his lack of action, and relieve him of his feelings of guilt or irresponsibility. Of course, while it could be argued that Quentin does not completely lose himself to his obsession with the past, or rather does not completely efface his identity in favor of the Sutpen love triangle, at the very least it is clear that he has invested a large portion of his identity in the southern myth of chivalry. This is perhaps best exemplified in the final lines of Absalom!, as Quentin releases his rage and despair in regard to the South and Sutpen's story: "'I don't hate it,' Quentin said quickly, at once, immediately; 'I don't hate it,' he said. *I don't hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!*" (303). He insists to Shreve and to himself that he does not hate the South, and thus does not hate his past, but he expresses it with such anger that he seemingly cannot convince himself. As Butery says, "the intensity of Quentin's emotion arises from the urgency of his need to glorify the South pitted against both his hatred of its desecration and his self-condemnation for his inability to defend it. The effort it takes to repress his hate also contributes to this intensity... Quentin's inner conflict is literally tearing him apart, but he does not understand what is happening to him... [His] detachment indicates the importance of keeping the full force of his hate from reaching his consciousness" (221). The very nature of Quentin's relationship to the history he has constructed is one of hate, and must necessarily be kept from consciousness: he recognizes the idealized glory of the south he grew up with is little more than a myth, and the combination of this recognition with his own failures results in his animosity. The fundamental antagonism between how he wants, or needs, to perceive the past, and what he ultimately creates is "an event that...

is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth 4). His final tirade, his insistence to Shreve that he does not hate the South, is the cry of a wounded psyche, and concludes “the story of a wound that cried out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (Caruth 4). The wound that cries its truth, in the case of Quentin, is his inability to reconcile what he knows and what he wants to believe. The history Quentin (re)constructs is traumatic, but this is more complex than having the Sutpen legacy merely mimic the form of a traumatic narrative. The Sutpen story itself traumatizes Quentin, and as historical creator/writer Quentin must necessarily convey this story as a traumatic narrative. Trauma is here located in two places: in the psyche of Quentin who is forced to confront his own personal failings, as well as the failings of his culture in which he has invested so much of his own personal identity, and in the narrative itself which must necessarily be a traumatic narrative, as its essence as experienced by Quentin cannot be conveyed in any other fashion.

Traumatic Temporality and Narrative Poetics

In his essay “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”, Freud writes “a strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which find its fulfillment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory” (442)¹⁵. Freud suggests that at the heart of the work of the creative writer is the activation of a memory by some event

occurring in the present, and according to this formulation, the work created in the present is the fulfillment of a wish from the past. While Quentin's creative (re)writing of the Sutpen love triangle in the present could be read as wish-fulfillment for his past failure with his own sister, what is eminently more interesting, and more relevant to the traumatic nature of history as presented in Absalom!, is the temporal element implicit in Freud's systematization of creative production. It is in the present that the artist locates an opportunity in which the past can be resolved. The creative work is the reconciliation of some "provoking occasion" that inspired it, and the unfulfilled past which lurks behind it and causes it to be "provoking". Freud illuminates the importance of temporality in creative writing more eloquently, suggesting "the wish makes use of an occasion on the present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future" (440). The very nature of time necessarily requires that the writer mediate differing intentions. For Freud, these differing intentions are to be located in the mind, or psyche, or the writer. But temporality, while a key component in the writer's mind, is necessarily bound up with narrative issues: the construction of any narrative requires the mediation of several antagonistic forces at work in its timescape. Paul de Man writes about the novel as form that :

Time acts as the healing and reconciling force against an estrangement, a distance that seems to be caused by the arbitrary intervention of a transcendental force. A slightly tighter exegetic pressure on the text reveals that this transcendental agent is itself temporal and that what is being offered as a remedy is in fact the disease itself. A negative statement about the essentially problematical and self-destructive nature of

the novel is disguised as a positive theory about its ability to rejoin, at the end of its dialectical development, *a state of origin that is purely fictional, though fallaciously presented as having historical existence*. (emphasis mine 103-04)¹⁶

Time itself in the text is a divisive force - a force which imposes a false sense of linearity onto the events that comprise the narrative - but it masquerades as a factor that solidifies the text, seemingly making it a complete unity unto itself. It is time which imposes upon the reader, and the text, a desire for origin - for a systematic unity - and which compels the writer to present an origin which possesses no true historical existence. In Freud's suggestion of creative writing as a mediation of wish-fulfillment and some event in the present which recalls it, he demonstrates the importance of the temporal element in writing, while he himself, perhaps unknowingly, makes it an organic force in his writing. But time plays a particularly perplexing role in Absalom!.

Obviously, the temporal inversion that occurs in Absalom!, especially in Quentin's writing of history - that of delving into the distant past but rewriting it in the present - signifies the importance of time in the novel. The Sutpen legend, as constructed by Quentin and Shreve in that cold dormitory room at Harvard, is more complicated than using the "present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future" since what should be a clearly linear temporality, as Freud suggests, is complicated. As Quentin looks backward, he seems to be in direct communication with the past, and the writing of history in Absalom! is not merely a dictation of events that have happened, according to the whims of the writer. Indeed, the way in which Quentin is haunted by the past, and the way he is unable to escape the Sutpen story and is driven to relive it, could

be read as a literalization of Faulkner's approach to the writing of history. What is suggested here is that the author of history is in direct communication with the past, and the author who attempts to write the past must necessarily be guided by this past to the same extent that he guides the past¹⁷.

As Quentin and Shreve search for meaning in Sutpen's story, Shreve pushes Quentin to delve deeper into the story, and to reveal more. Quentin responds, and becomes enveloped in his own thinking:

"Don't say it's just me that sounds like your old man," Shreve said. "But go on. Sutpen's children. Go on."

"Yes," Quentin said. "The two children" thinking *Yes. Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached 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.* (210)

As Shreve impels him to reveal more details of the Sutpen mystery, Quentin paradoxically loses himself in thought, dwelling on the connectedness between those recreating the Sutpen story, and Sutpen himself. And as individual identities are blurred into one mass identity, there is a blurring of time as well: the initial ripple caused by the pebble quickly spreads into many ripples that are indistinguishable from one another, suggesting chronology or temporal distance are irrelevant to the event itself. Indeed, generational difference collapses as there is no definitive statement that father must create son, but rather they form one unity and either one could create the other. The chronological necessity that father must beget son - the very definitions of familial relations which are so implicitly temporally bound - falls apart in Quentin's formulation of history. Because, to be sure, this pool-and-pebble metaphor privileges above all else narrative¹⁸.

Quentin's allegory of the pebble falling in the water and its sending ripples spreading out through the water speaks directly to the nature of the traumatic historical event that can be relayed only through narrative. The (historical) event here - the pebble falling into the water - is felt only in its effects, the ripples that line the surface of the pool continually moving along the surface of the pool, moving further away from the event that caused it, but existing because of, and carrying with it, the event. And as the pool which received the initial event comes into contact with a second pool, whose difference from the first is negligible, it too carries with it the impact of the event. In this second pool, which had no direct contact with the initial event - which did not directly experience the pebble falling - the ripples spread nonetheless, and impact of the event is perpetrated again. Here, literally, the (historical) event is "felt in its effects" as it is the narratives that

carry its significance and which make its effects felt. And as narratives about the event are necessarily privileged over the event itself - the pebble's falling is unnoticeable if not for the ripples - temporality itself falls apart. The chronology of the event happening then followed by the narrative which would describe it is strangely subverted as the ripple passes from one pool to the next (perhaps the narrative passing from one person to the next). Indeed, in this formulation of the transmission of the event, the event itself is eventually somehow lost or inaccessible or irrelevant, and it is the transmission which takes precedence. And in a construction of history where the narrative and its transmission is privileged over the event itself, time cannot act as the healing force it is so often considered to be. Time, here, cannot be that force which links together the sequence of events presented into some kind of significant, and signifying, narrative order which privileges and places the event in its center: the essence of the traumatic event is such that its recitation cannot allow this type of straightforward causality. Freud's systematization of narrative as using the past in the present to create a picture of the future falls apart in dealing with history, or at least history as presented in Absalom!.

The traumatic nature of history, as experienced by Quentin, stretches the temporal compartmentalizing Freud depends upon, and the past of trauma bleeds into the present and future. It is Quentin himself, the listener and the writer of history, who embodies the manner in which history in Absalom! is treated as a force that seemingly lives outside time. The creation and observing of the historical narrative here that is the Sutpen legacy is, like the traumatic narrative, exempt from the temporality that anchors other narratives. As the traumatic event dwells in its narrative, causality or temporal linearity is lost. As Freud writes in "Fixation to Traumas - The Unconscious", "it may happen, too, that a

person is brought so completely to a stop by a traumatic event which shatters the foundations of his life that he abandons all interest in the present and the future and remains permanently absorbed in mental concentration upon the past” (316)¹⁹. Quentin’s reliving the Sutpen narrative forces him to abandon the past and future, or rather to absorb them into the past. And yet, the traumatic event did happen; the pebble necessarily fell in a pool to send those ripples through neighbouring pools. Although the haunting nature of the Sutpen story seems to bypass time in Quentin’s mind, an origin to the story is still sought: that “*state of origin that is purely fictional, though fallaciously presented as having historical existence*” is required in Quentin’s writing of the past, so that even though his narratives are conveyed in the same manner as trauma narratives, which necessarily can never access what it is that generated them, he seeks to uncover the traumatic event. Quentin’s ‘writing’ possesses in its core the desire to illuminate an event, and by extension a hermeneutic, that will impose design, reason and logic to Sutpen’s story. Despite its failed referentiality, the traumatic narrative is not merely narrative for the sake of narrative. It is finally driven by a need to articulate and reclaim that original event despite the impossibility of doing so.

Creating the Traumatic Event

Quentin’s fascination with the Sutpen story resides, to a certain extent, in the love triangle, and its echoes of his own failure as a Southern gentleman. The extra-temporal element of historical writing in Absalom! allows Quentin not only to be fascinated by what he has heard about the Sutpen story, but also to mold the story to his own motives: the creation of the Sutpen narrative here is a collaborative endeavour for Quentin between

what he has heard and what he speculates. In this historical creation, both Henry and Quentin are torn between what they want and how they feel compelled to act. For Henry, this lies in the conflict of killing his friend and brother to maintain their father's design, which according to Sutpen, can be ruined only by the prospect of miscegenation. In Sutpen's design, race becomes a crucial factor, and the "mysterious hermeneutic" which is always approached by those who tell Sutpen's story, but never fully or explicitly dealt with. And as Quentin and Shreve reconstruct the final confrontation between Henry and Bon, they fixate upon race as Henry obeys orders to prevent Bon's marriage to Judith:

-So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you can't bear.

Henry doesn't answer.

-And he sent me no word? He did not ask you to send me to him?

No word to me, no word at all? That was all he had to do, now, today; four years ago or at any time during the four years. That was all. He would not have needed to ask it, require it, of me. I would have offered it. I would have said, I will never see her again before he could have asked it of me. He did not have to do this, Henry. He didn't need to tell you I am a nigger to stop me. He could have stopped me without that, Henry. (285)

In a last-ditch effort to subvert Sutpen's grand design, Bon commits himself to marrying his half-sister Judith, and Bon claims this plan is the inevitable byproduct of Sutpen's unwillingness to acknowledge him as his son²⁰. And yet, as Bon realizes that Henry has been sent by their father to kill him, he also realizes that Sutpen is completely unconcerned over the possibility of incest in the Bon-Judith relationship, but rather fears the prospect of miscegenation (the repetition of Sutpen's own 'crime'). It is racial mixing

which poses the most threat to Sutpen's plan, and it is this which he must eliminate from his family. In this confrontation between Henry and Bon, Henry is forced to uphold traditional white southern thinking at the cost of fratricide. They continue, and Bon sees the pistol Henry has concealed:

-No! Henry cries. ---No! No! I will---I'll-----...

-Think of her. Not of me: of her.

-I have. For four years. Of you and her. Now I am thinking of myself.

-No, Henry says. ---No.

-I cannot?

-You shall not.

-Who will stop me, Henry?

-No, Henry says. ---No. No. No...

Now it is Bon who watches Henry; he can see the whites of Henry's eyes again as he sits looking at Henry with that expression which might be called smiling. His hand vanishes beneath the blanket and reappears, holding his pistol by the barrel, the butt extended toward Henry.

-Then do it now, he says

Henry looks at the pistol; now he is not only panting, he is trembling; when he speaks now his voice is not even the exhalation, it is the suffused and suffocating inbreath itself:

-You are my brother.

-No I'm not. I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister.

Unless you stop me, Henry. (285-86)

In this exchange, as constructed by Quentin and Shreve, Bon interpellates Henry into the position of maintaining southern ideals, or more specifically racism, and to put them before his own feelings. In this construction of the final confrontation between Henry and Bon, Quentin locates the fear of miscegenation as the propulsive force in the metonymy of southern culture that is Sutpen's life²¹. In their recreation of the fall of Sutpen, Henry is required by his father to end the threat that Bon poses to the Sutpen empire at the cost of Bon's life, and in the narrative Quentin invents this showdown is the climactic event²²; it is the central episode which will unify the various happenings in their story into a coherent plot. Miscegenation, and the threat it poses to southern life, is what they perceive as reason, or *meaning*, of Sutpen's life. But Quentin's attitudes towards the treatment of racial difference in the South necessarily complicates this scene. As Karl says:

...even more than Henry, however, Quentin is the one to embrace the full racial dilemma: the knowledge that the Negro should be equal, and yet the feeling that for the white Southerner things are more complicated than that... The question of race becomes a question of destruction. If we seek Faulkner's point about racial matters in the novel, we must conclude that he perceived race as heading toward suicide, murder, doom. Sutpen, the man of will, the man of destiny in the American mold, has been doomed by race: that fractional element that has evaded his design. (216-19)

The inability to understand, or control, race proves to be Sutpen's downfall, and provides the most likely hermeneutic of Quentin's version of the story: the perplexing phenomenon of race is that component which has superseded all of Sutpen's ambition and careful planning, finally frustrating and terminating Sutpen's "design". Yet, when Henry finally shoots Bon (a moment the reader has been driving towards in the text), it happens as speculation: the shooting itself is not an event described in detail, but is rather inferred, implied, and communicated through silence. The reader is never explicitly told what has happened, but is left like those who have heard the Sutpen tale to reconstruct the event himself. Like the traumatic event, the actual shooting is subsumed in its effects, in the stories that emanate from it. Indeed, this is a shot, which like the ripples in the water caused by a pebble, is "*heard only by its echo*", as Rosa will attest earlier in the book (123). Racial difference, as constructed by Sutpen, is difficult for Quentin to understand; so difficult in fact, that the narrative he creates *around* it cannot thoroughly describe its effect, but is forced to circle about it, and merely to suggest the implications it carries. The narrativized nature of history, and race, come to the foreground in this speculated event, and like the traumatic experience, race for Quentin can never be completely understood or assimilated in this narrative process, its very definition lying in its inaccessibility.

* * *

To prove that race, or the recognition of racial difference, is in fact a traumatic phenomenon would be tenuous at best, and presumably Absalom! could not withstand that kind of external pressure. What needs to be recognized, though, is how racial matters

and narrative technique are bound together in the text, and their cumulative essence seems to have something to do with the way trauma is narrativized. Absalom, Absalom! is, ultimately, an anecdote on the failure of progress in the South as typified in the blind ambition of Thomas Sutpen. But at the heart of Sutpen's demise is the impossible combination of incest and miscegenation in the same love affair. This anecdote, as told through various sources, culminates in the figure of Quentin who is compelled repeatedly to return to it, and to piece together a narrative from the fragments he has heard and experienced. Despite his escape North the burden of history is too great, and he is haunted by the Sutpen legacy which casts its shadow of failure across generations and distance. The impossible history of the American South, and the racism it founded itself upon, becomes a recurring figure in the imagination of Quentin, burning its imprint into his consciousness. Because Quentin remains incapable of grasping what he has heard, and what history, and its construction, mean to him in the present, he is forced to repeatedly cycle around history - or in this case that historical event (the murder of Bon) which somehow aligns his entire narrative - and through narratives that approximate but never claim it. It is the intermingling of race, history and narrative that is so strikingly complex in Absalom, Absalom!, and like Quentin the reader is forced to speculate not only the Sutpen story, but more importantly the relation of the present to history and its influence on the design of race.

Chapter Three: The Ethical Relations of Race, History, and Individual Identity in

Go Down, Moses

As Absalom, Absalom! engages the immediacy of history, it becomes particularly clear that Faulkner's polemical project is to demonstrate the uncertainty of, and speculation inherent in, historical construction. What he articulates in that novel is the impossibility of creating a thorough and complete historical model through narrative, while simultaneously recognizing that all history is in fact narrativized. Go Down, Moses extends this notion, and builds upon the elusiveness of history, complicating and literalizing the trauma implicit in recognizing the inaccessibility of historical origin.

In the historical and genealogical maze that is Go Down, Moses, to suggest that Ike McCaslin is the central, and pivotal, character is not particularly daring. If Go Down, Moses is in fact a coherent and sustained novel, and not a series of distinct, though related, stories, then "The Bear" provides the novel with its centerpiece: it is the section which provides the novel with an arching unity, imposing on the stories preceding it a relevance and direction, and influencing any interpretation of the stories that follow it. "The Bear", in short, more than any other story in the novel makes it a novel, providing an all-encompassing hermeneutic to the text(s), and a definitive reading of Go Down, Moses and the individual stories which comprise it¹. It offers Go Down, Moses, and the reader, a model through which to read the other stories without imposing the meaning of one story onto the others, or foreclosing the density of each individual story; rather, it allows the meaning of one story to exist in conjunction with the less apparent meanings from other stories in which any potential meanings may be obscured, or at least seem to

lack relevance to one another. Positing “The Bear,” Faulkner’s most compelling example of masterful storytelling, as the center of Go Down, Moses, allows for a unification of the text, and the most easily accessible means of a clear hermeneutic in a literary style and form (the collapsing of several distinct stories into a ‘novel’) in which meaning is obscured: it is a situation of elucidation - and not coercion - of meaning. But “The Bear” is perhaps more complex a center than is apparent, or than one seeking meaning would desire. Its various narrative strands, interwoven and dependent upon each other for existence and meaning, present the reader with a perplexing array of sketches, ranging from the wilderness and the hunt for Old Ben, to the incestuous miscegenation of Roth Edmonds and the granddaughter of Tennie’s Jim. At its core, though, “The Bear” possesses a double-binding of narrative, as it is simultaneously the narrative *of* Ike McCaslin, his individual maturation implicit in the hunt, *and* Ike McCaslin’s narrative, the reasoning behind his mysterious renunciation of his paternal rights, its foundation in a fact he has somehow known throughout his life, finally revealed to the reader. And it is in this fact - the founding father Old Carothers McCaslin’s rape of his own slave daughter Tomey - that the various narrative strands - history, race, paternity and genealogy, property and desire - of both “The Bear” and Go Down, Moses collide in an explosive, revelatory hermeneutic which illuminates the individual stories and, more importantly, their relatedness, and provides Faulkner’s definitive statement on race relations, despite its apparent concealment. For, to be sure, any statement on race is concealed, existing not as a clear statement, but residing within the narrative and ‘plot’ spaces, and in the gaps between character relations.

Locating the Traumatic Center

Section four of "The Bear" (not contained in the original short story version but added for the novel form) begins with Ike at the age of 21 and deals explicitly with his renunciation of his paternal inheritance. In an intriguing blend of stream-of-consciousness, dialogue, and history, Ike's rejection of what is rightfully his is bound up with historical fact, as made evident by the ledgers kept by his father Uncle Buck and his father's brother Uncle Buddy, and also by his grandfather and their father, old Carothers McCaslin. The ledgers themselves - a chronicle of property possession: slave trading and slave multiplying - seem to bear the authority of historical fact in a land (in the Faulknerian vision of Yoknapatawpha) where history is primarily speculative. Whereas historiography is typically generated by dialogue between individuals and eras, the ledgers present history as a series of quantifiable, chronological events easily located and understood. The ledgers themselves hold a particularly important position in Ike's life, as he returns to them year after year, re-reading the same purchases and sales until they take "substance and even a sort of shadowy life with their passions and complexities too as page followed page and year year" (254)². In childhood, Ike returns to the ledgers yearly, not even reading them, but rather just examining them, aware of their potential importance:

As a child and even after nine and ten and eleven, when he had learned to read, he would look up at the scarred and cracked backs and ends but with no particular desire to open them, and though he intended to examine them someday because he realised 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 the whites but the black one 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 and fed from and on and would continue to use in common without regard to color 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.

(256)

The young Ike examines the ledgers in their apocryphal wonder, recognizing their importance without even reading them, an importance situated in the ledgers ability to accurately, and chronologically, reflect the history of the descendants of the McCaslin land, both black and white. For the young Ike, the mystery inherent in the ledgers possesses its importance because of its racialized organization. But at sixteen, Ike makes a startling discovery:

June 21th 1833 Drownd herself

and the first:

23 Jun 1833 Who in hell ever heard of a nigger drowning 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

and he thought *But why? But why?* He was sixteen then. It was neither the first time he had been alone in the commissary nor the first time he had

taken down the old ledgers familiar on their shelf above the desk ever since he could remember. (256)

As Ike reads through the discussion registered in the ledgers between his father Buck and his uncle Buddy, he fixates on the drowning of the slave woman Eunice (whose marriage to Thucydus is recorded just prior to her drowning). The fact of her drowning is recorded in bewilderment by the old twins, their creation of history distanced from them, neatly bound and recorded, literalizing the Faulknerian perception of history as existing in the various dialogues which attempt to deal with it. Even the sixteen-year-old Ike's thoughts being printed in the text as italics, the same script of the ledgers, would suggest that his confusion about the drowning - an event we are told he has read before, perhaps only casually, but now finally fixates upon - is his entry into the dialogue that is the McCaslin history. But Ike discovers the reason for the Eunice's suicide, even though it is not explicitly recorded:

... he leaned above the yellowed page and 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? finding, beginning to find on the next succeeding page what he knew he would find, only this was still not because he already knew this:

Tomasina called Tomy Daughter of Thucydus @ Eunice

Born 1810 dide in Child bed June 1833 and Burd.. Yr Stars fell

nor the next:

Turl Son of Thucydus @ Eunice Tomy born Jun 1833 yr stars fell
Fathers will (257)

Within the ledgers, the birth of Tomy is recorded, and is immediately followed by the birth of her son Turl (or Tomey's Turl as he is known throughout much of the novel). And, as Ike reads the juxtaposition of the births of these two people, he speculates on the nature of their relationship: "... the books which McCaslin kept did not include obituaries: just *Fathers will* and he had seen that too: old Carothers' bold cramped hand far less legible than his sons'... [and] he [Carothers] made no effort either to explain or obfuscate the thousand-dollar legacy to the son of an unmarried slave-girl, to be paid only at the child's coming-of-age..." (257). As Ike reads Carothers' writing, imposed on the historical narrative created by Buck and Buddy, he notes the inheritance left in "*Fathers will*" signals something irregular since a thousand dollar sum from the founding father is left to the son of an unmarried slave girl - an unorthodox practice for slaveholders, to be sure. What Ike eventually realizes, blending his own speculations with historical "fact" is that old Carothers had sex with the married slave Eunice, producing Tomasina (who, erroneously in the ledgers, is attributed to Eunice's relationship with Thucydus). But what Ike posits is that the son the unmarried Tomey produces is fathered by her own father, a rape which causes Eunice to drown herself in despair³. As Ike and the reader discover the hidden truth within the historical records, the silent reality of the incestuous rape, he becomes lost in a whirlwind of emotions and thoughts, and the historical reality of his ancestors - the founding father Carother McCaslin - burns its imprint into his youthful psyche, and is nothing short of a traumatic experience.

Cathy Caruth writes that trauma is “an event... experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again” (4)⁴. In Caruth’s formulation, the traumatic event is such that its experience takes the survivor by surprise and places him in a position of uncertainty as to what he has experienced. It is this uncertainty which prevents the experience from being integrated into consciousness. And as it is impossible to “make sense” of an event whose very nature is defined by its impossibility, the survivor is forced to return to it repeatedly in an attempt to understand and move past. But to suggest that Ike’s realization of the founding father’s rape of his own daughter - indeed, Ike’s cousin - is traumatic, is tenuous at best. What Ike experiences is the sudden knowledge of an event that has happened in the past, an event that would seem to affect him only peripherally and indirectly. But this knowledge of the past itself has direct implications concerning the present, and its traumatic nature resides in its atemporality. Caruth goes on to suggest that “trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of *a reality or truth that is not otherwise available*. This truth, in its *delayed* appearance and its *belated* address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and language” (emphasis mine 5). As Ike stumbles across Eunice’s suicide so many years later and finally hears her voice residing in near silence in the pages of the dusty ledgers, her pain and subsequent death (caused by the psychic trauma resulting from the knowledge of her daughter’s rape), signals the rape itself and a perverse fallibility in the founding father, a genealogical flaw, for Ike, which echoes across time and space, finally coalescing in his psyche. Eunice’s death demands Ike’s

attention; it speaks to a reality (both past and present) that Ike is required to recognize and adapt to.

As Ike re-creates the relationship between old Carothers and Tomey, their relationship seems to come hauntingly alive: “and that was all. The old frail pages seemed to turn of their own accord even while he thought *His own daughter His own daughter. No No Not even him...* that was all. He 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 forever, as the fact of his own nativity” (259). Ike no longer needs the ledgers to provide insight into what he feared, because at sixteen what he had always speculated in the deep recesses of his mind has been confirmed as truth: the miscegenation on the McCaslin land is endogamous to the same extent that it is exogamous. And yet, the incest culminating in the figure of Terrel (or Tomey’s Turl) is something Ike has always known, on some level:

And Tomey’s Terrel was still alive when the boy was ten years old and he knew from his own observation and memory that there had already been some white in Tomey’s Terrel’s blood before his father gave him the rest of it; and looking down at the yellowed page spread beneath the yellow glow of the lantern smoking and stinking in that rank chill midnight room fifty years later, he seemed to see her 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, solitary, inflexible, griefless, ceremonial, in formal and succinct repudiation of grief and despair who had already had to repudiate belief and hope (259)

Ike becomes a witness to Eunice's suicide, which occurs in simultaneity with the birth of her grandson Terrel, who before birth "had to repudiate belief and hope". In this moment - the recreation of history and the traumatic recognition of its perverse origin - Ike is forced to bear testimony to the violence of the past on the present, and is required to bear witness to an event whose existence resides in a time long since past.

The Traumatic Formation of Individual Identity

Doreen Fowler suggests that Ike's recognition of the McCaslin past inevitably leads to his renunciation of the paternal McCaslin order perpetuated on the "cursed" McCaslin land. She writes:

In both instances - when Ike refuses to kill Old Ben and when he repudiates his patrimony - Ike is rejecting the place that has been set aside for him: he is renouncing the role of father. In Freudian terms, when Ike refuses to kill the bear, who functions as a father in the wilderness, Ike is refusing to be the oedipal son who kills the father and claims the father's favored, empowered status. Similarly, when Ike repudiates his paternal inheritance, he is once again disclaiming the paternal signifier: he is refusing to accede to a place of power and authority identified with the father and with fatherly repression, as exemplified by the killing of the bear or by Old Carother's dehumanized treatment of his black family. (129)⁵

In Fowler's psychoanalytic explication of Ike's actions, she suggests he ultimately rejects the phallus and chooses not to allow his subjectivity to be typically constituted (as defined

by Freud). Indeed, as the father symbolizes the phallus (and vice versa) he is inextricably bound to the child's fear of castration - a fear developed from the child's recognition of the mother's lack of external genitalia, and the belief that this lack is due to the father's actions - and the child performs a psychic self-castration, denying the use of his own phallus in an effort to avoid the father's punishment. As Fowler points out via Lacan, "the phallus forbids the child satisfaction of his or her own desire, which is the desire to be the exclusive desire of the mother" (131); what is crucial, and more relevant here, is that this initial trauma defines the self: the lack designated within the child by the (symbolic) loss of the phallus, a lack resulting from the desire for/absence of the mother, is the very lack required to create an other, and provides that first and crucial rupture between self and surroundings that results in individual identity.

In the psychoanalytic conceptualization of subject formation, the castrated child, who has now achieved an individualism not possible without this psychic operation, must eventually assume the role of the castrating father in his own life: the child must eventually ascend to the role of the Father. Ike, in the rejection of his patrimony, refuses to progress in this fashion and consequently forever traps himself within the subject position of the child afraid of the Law of the Father. As Fowler goes on to suggest: "Ike's choice is problematic... [He] is refusing to seek to take the father's place and chooses instead the only other option: to remain forever the son: by surrendering the use of the penis and the father's command, he performs a metaphorical self-castration" (132). What Fowler reads in Ike's renunciation of his heritage and patrimony, is an inability to move beyond the "primary repression that constitutes identity" (133) - that traumatic realization of the castrating potential of the Father and the creation of the lack that subsequently

creates the self - rendering Ike incapable of achieving an appropriate, and complete, identity. For, to be sure, Ike's independent discovery of old Carothers' rape of his own daughter, and his enslavement of his own family, is nothing short of the traumatizing primal scene⁶.

Freud writes about trauma, that "the term 'traumatic' has no other sense than an economic one. We apply it to an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates" (315)⁷. This stimulus, the traumatic event, is such that not only will it never be completely integrated into the consciousness of he who experiences it, but also its very impossibility requires the sufferer to deal with it, in an attempt to exorcise it, in ways that are perhaps unconventional. Said another way, the definition of an event as 'traumatic' is merely one of practical utility, used to mark linguistically - and thus contain - an event that cannot be contained; as its effects range far beyond its immediate impact, the effects themselves gain an atemporal immediacy found in their confrontational and repetitive nature. Indeed, conceptualizing trauma in this fashion not only provides a more accurate clinical model to work with but has far-reaching implications, the most relevant here being its provision of a way to theorize history in its "delayed appearance and its belated address".

In writing about the traumatic nature of the history of Judaism, Caruth writes that "the belated experience of trauma in Jewish monotheism suggests that history is not only the passing on of a crisis but also the passing on of a survival that can only be possessed within a history larger than any single individual or any single generation" (71). As Ike is

traumatized in his confrontation with the McCaslin history, an event that functions as a traumatic origin, the potentially traumatic nature of history is foregrounded as the rape of Tamey and cannot be contained within the past, but bleeds into the present, and becomes an event which results "in permanent disturbances of the manner in which [his] energy operates." It is not possible for Ike to respond to his heritage and work the trauma of his history off in "normal" ways: he cannot merely assume the role of the Father by accepting his patrimony as a means of moving beyond his traumatic origins - the typical next step in subject formation - but is forced through the very urgency of this trauma, and through his role as witness, to find an alternate way to deal with this history⁸. For Ike, the only move possible is to repudiate his inheritance; in acknowledging history as traumatic, he denies the very process of subject formation.

When Ike finally removes himself from the McCaslin legacy by surrendering paternal leadership to his cousin McCaslin Edmonds, he fails to provide an exact reason for his actions: "Let me talk now. I'm trying to explain to the head of my family something which I have got to do which I don't quite understand myself, not in justification of it but to explain it if I can. I could say I don't know why I must do it but that I do know I have got to because I have got myself to have to live with for the rest of my life and all I want is peace to do it in..." (275). Here, Ike posits the rejection as the only course of action that will provide him with peace of mind, despite being unable to distill a particular reason why he feels this way: he does not know why he must do it, merely that he must⁹. Yet despite this inability to explain, or perhaps partly because of it, it would seem that Ike's violent history compels him to act in a certain way, or to somehow atone for the crimes of his ancestors¹⁰. Here, the traumatic event of the past

requires - according to Ike - action, not necessarily to rectify it, but at least to acknowledge it. Indeed, even as Ike reflects with his cousin, McCaslin Edmonds, upon the theological 'history' of colonization and slavery in the American South, he describes God as an ultimate authority, but one who has failed in his responsibility:

‘...and so He... must accept responsibility for what He Himself had done in order to live with Himself in His lonely and paramount heaven. And He probably knew it was vain but He had created them and knew them capable of all things because He had shaped them out of the primal Absolute which contained all... and they themselves not knowing why nor how nor even when: until at last He say that they were all Grandfather all of them and that even from them the elected and chosen the best the very best He could expect (not hope mind; not hope) would be Bucks and Buddies and not even enough of them and in the third generation not even Bucks and Buddies but---’ (270)

Ike feels compelled to accept responsibility for what has happened in order to “live with himself”, and he suspects God must have felt the same way. But even God must have surely known - must have possessed some foreknowledge - that the McCaslin land would be cursed, and that the following generations of descendants from old Carothers, the original settler and founding father, would possess his blood, and that even his sons Buck and Buddy, who must surely be better than their father, would fail to set their own slaves free or acknowledge their complicity in the violence perpetrated on and against the land. The crisis of history - of slavery - must necessarily be passed on, from generation to generation, and here, God must have surely known this, and seen that Buck and Buddy,

the second generation McCaslins would not have been enough to allow for a dissipation of the “energy” (that Freudian concept of psychic imbalance generated through trauma) caused by old Carothers’ actions. Indeed, even Ike sees himself in this conceptualization of God’s plan, noting, ““Yes. If He could see Father and Uncle Buddy in Grandfather He must have seen me too. --- an Isaac born into a later life than Abraham’s and repudiating immolation: fatherless and therefore safe declining the alter because maybe this time the exasperated Hand might not supply the kid---”” (270-71). The third generation rejecting his patrimony and even his biological father Buck, Ike envisions himself as the sacrificial son for old Carothers, reinforcing the notion that Ike’s discovery in the ledgers enacts a kind of primal scene, one in which identity is finally conferred, carrying with it the weight of trauma, and ultimately requiring him to deny the presentation of the self for sacrifice, in case God fails and does “not supply the kid” instead.

An Ethical Approach to Trauma

When Caruth interprets Lacan’s work on trauma, she writes that “in thus implicitly exploring consciousness as figured by the survivor whose life is inextricably linked to the death he witnesses, Lacan resituates the psyche’s relation to the real not as a simple matter of seeing or of knowing the nature of empirical events, not as what can be known or what cannot be known about reality, but as the story of an urgent responsibility, or what Lacan defines, in this conjunction, as an *ethical* relation to the real” (102). If the consciousness of the trauma survivor is permanently altered by what he experiences - or witnesses as is the case with Ike - then a new method of configuring his psyche is required. And in this re-configuring, the real - that element of constancy which can never

be completely known, and is in this case the actual traumatic event itself - needs to be rethought. For the survivor, it is no longer important whether the real is accessible and knowable (indeed its inaccessibility is only too painfully obvious for the survivor), but rather it is the relationship to this inaccessible and unknowable real that must be reconfigured. For Lacan, Caruth, and even Isaac McCaslin, it is precisely because of this unknowability that the relationship to the event takes precedence over the event itself. And this relationship is one that is necessarily guided by ethics¹¹.

Because Ike realizes that the slaves on the McCaslin land are his own family, he feels compelled to give away his paternal inheritance and authority to his cousin McCaslin Edmonds, in order to evade his complicity: this is the only (psychoanalytically) ethical option available to him, enacting McCaslin's advice of "escape" (271). Even as Ike speaks to the issue of the recently freed slaves, a freedom dictated by Lincoln and not the slaveholders, he thinks "*Apparently there is a wisdom beyond even that learned through suffering necessary for a man to distinguish between liberty and license*" (277), and he could be speaking about himself, and the insight, or ethical agenda, he has gained from his traumatic recognition. When Caruth suggests that Freudian thought traces the importance of trauma "from... an exception, an accident that takes consciousness by surprise and thus disrupts it, to trauma as the very origin on consciousness and all of life itself" (104), she makes explicit the importance of trauma for defining subjectivity. Trauma gives birth to consciousness, and is consequently always implicit in the very nature of consciousness. When he witnesses the primal scene printed in the ledgers, Ike refuses to submit to the Law of the Father, and thus engages a process of subject formation that does not impel him to accede to the place of the Father, but rather, because

of his ethical relation to the real, or history, dictated by those yellowed pages, is required to renounce it. Here, Ike's recognition of racial difference is not based in biological fact, but rather in his relations to the 'real' of racial difference. Racial difference - or what is surely racism in Faulkner's work - does not function as the inevitable result of a (biological) reality, but as an (ethical) relation to this reality, finally suggesting that this biological difference, or the recognition of its existence, can never fully be understood or accepted, and functions as nothing less than a traumatic blow to the psyche of Faulkner's characters. This is perhaps made more evident from the viewpoint of Roth Edmonds, a white McCaslin who earlier in the novel presents this perspective on race in a fashion that is easier to delineate.

The Ethics of 'Real' Racial Difference

As Roth Edmonds reflects upon his youth in relation to the Beauchamp family in "The Fire and the Hearth", he remembers a crucial moment in his friendship (which is almost a fraternity of sorts) to Lucas's son Henry. We are told that as young boys they eat, play, and even sleep together, but at some point Roth feels compelled to treat Henry differently in order to demarcate him as an inferior. After spending the day together, and eating at Henry's home, Roth abruptly announces he is returning to his own house to spend the night, at which point Henry agrees to go with him. Roth remembers "how they walked that half mile to his house in the first summer dark, himself walking just fast enough that the negro boy never quite came up beside him"(108), eventually arriving at the Edmonds' home. At bed-time they prepare to share the pallet on the floor like they have done countless times before, Roth unexpectedly climbs into the bed, but prevents

Henry from joining him: "Henry didn't move. 'You mean you dont want me to sleep in the bed?' Nor did the boy move. He didn't answer, rigid on his back, staring upward. 'All right,' Henry said quietly and went back to the pallet and lay down again" (108). In this moment, the innocence of their friendship, and even Roth's personal innocence, is lost in a moment of racism. The social codes that dictate and perpetuate racism, and that mar innocence and drive apart friends and brothers, come to the foreground here but are felt in their effects, since their origins and needs remain unknown to the young Roth:

"Shut up!" the boy said. "How'm I or you neither going to sleep if you keep on talking?" Henry hushed then. But the boys didn't sleep, long after Henry's quiet and untroubled breathing had begun, lying in a rigid fury of the grief he could not explain, the shame he would not admit. Then he slept and it seemed to him he was still awake, waked and did not know he had slept until he saw in the gray of dawn the empty pallet on the floor. They did not hunt that morning. They never slept in the same room again and never again ate at the same table because he admitted to himself it was shame now and he did not go to Henry's house and for a month he only saw Henry at a distance... Then one day he knew it was grief and was ready to admit it was shame also, wanted to admit it only it was too late then, forever and forever too late. (109)

Roth destroys the camaraderie he shared with Henry, though he is incapable of suggesting why he feels compelled to do so. Here, race is not a particular behaviour (whether essentialist or constructed in nature) as Quentin Compson suggests in The Sound and the Fury, but rather racial difference exists in the behavioural *relations* between whites and

blacks. There is, in this formulation, a necessary dislocation of a centered racial perspective as racism exists not because of inherent differences, but rather because of, and within, the communication between races. Said another way, it is the inevitable, linked meanings drawn from the signification process of black/white skin color that take precedence over the actual skin color itself: it is what those colors come to represent for the individual, and his relationship to their representational interrelationships, where racial difference lies.

Alan Sheridan writes that the Lacanian real is:

...linked to the symbolic and the imaginary: it stands for what is neither symbolic nor imaginary, and remains foreclosed from the analytic experience, which is an experience of speech... This Lacanian concept of the 'real' is not to be confused with reality, which is perfectly knowable... Hence the formula: 'the real is the impossible'. It is in this sense that the term begins to appear regularly, as an adjective, to describe that which is lacking in the symbolic order, the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic. (ix-x)¹²

Since the experience of the 'real', and consequently its precise nature, cannot be articulated, in a reversal of perhaps 'typical' logic, the 'real' cannot be known. Indeed, as the 'real' is filtered through the symbolic and the imaginary, and approximated through speech, it is necessarily subjugated to the substitutive relations of which language is composed. In Lacan's formulation of the psyche, there is a priority placed on the relationships between symbolic signifiers (those elements that attempt to represent the

real) that suggests it is the relationship of he who uses these symbolic substitutions to these symbols, rather than his seemingly real experience of the 'real', that is more immediately important. Sheridan makes this clearer, suggesting "the symbols... are... signifiers...: differential elements, in themselves without meaning, which acquire value only in their mutual relations, and forming a closed order... Henceforth, it is the symbolic... that is seen to be the determining order of the subject, and its effects are radical: the subject, in Lacan's sense, is himself an effect of the symbolic" (ix). The individual, to put it crudely, is created and defined by language. And, while much of Faulkner's other work, such as Light in August, examines the inability of language to completely contain or define the individual (particularly in terms of racial difference), Go Down, Moses possesses a slightly different aim. The 'real' of racial difference, that presumably biological and phenotypic element present in each individual, is literally unknowable on the McCaslin land since everyone, black and white, slave and master is descended from the same individual. Faulkner's subversion of the symbol of race, which through its relationships with other culturally agreed upon symbols should indicate some meaning in racial difference, not only prioritizes the constructed relationships within language over biology as the true site of racial difference, but also suggests that the individual's relationship to these linguistic relationships is ultimately an ethical one, even if one chooses, like Roth Edmonds, to act in an unethical manner.

For Roth, the need to force Henry into an inferior position requires acting counter to how he has seen his family interact with the Beauchamp family, though presumably he seeks to reiterate the relations between his father and other, perhaps non-related, black slaves. What ought to be the assertion of Roth's superiority, as dictated by the

white/black binary implicit in race, and so desperately insisted upon by the culture Faulkner writes about, leaves him feeling ashamed and grieving over his actions. When Roth attempts to reconcile with Henry and the Beauchamp family by returning to eat with them one day, he believes things have returned to normal; however, he is suddenly surprised that Mollie will prepare food for him but they will not sit and eat with him:

But it was too late... Henry was turning toward the door to go out of it.

“Are you ashamed to eat when I eat?” he cried.

Henry paused, turning his head a little to speak in the voice slow and without heat: “I aint shamed of nobody,” he said peacefully. “Not even me.”

So he entered his heritage. He ate its bitter fruit. He listened as Lucas referred to his father as Mr Edmonds, never as Mister Zack... At last he spoke to his father about it. The other listened gravely, with something in his face which the boy could not read and which at the moment he paid little attention to since he was still young then, still a child; he had not yet divined that there was something between his father and Lucas, something more than difference in race could account for since it did not exist between Lucas and any other white man, something more than the white blood, even the McCaslin blood, could account for since it was not there between his uncle Isaac McCaslin and Lucas. (110-11)

In what is perhaps the most poetic, and tragic, examination of the divisive effects of racism in Faulkner’s work, racism is beyond actions and words. Race relations - or rather

the relations to race - are necessarily ethical, and Roth's moral violation against his own biological, but more importantly cultural, family can never be undone, and unlike Ike, Roth enters "his heritage" and eats "its bitter fruit". Even as Henry suggests that he "aint shamed of nobody... not even me", he emphasizes the ethical nature of race relations on the McCaslin land, knowing that as a 'nigger' McCaslin he is an object to be loathed. But as the Beauchamps deny Roth the resumption of the family-like bonds he has been raised to know, which must surely be traumatic for the young boy, he becomes acutely aware of the complex relationship between his father, and his father's slave and relative Lucas Beauchamp - a relationship whose quiet conflict resides in some unspeakable bond that lies outside of racial difference, as enacted by Roth towards Henry.

A Return to the Father

The narrator stresses that Roth is still only a child, but his awareness of racial difference will become significant later in his life. Racism cannot fully account for the distance between Zack and Lucas, because racism defined by Roth - what he believes is a simple recognition of white supremacy as enacted in his last encounter with Henry - would require Zack's relationship with Lucas to imitate those between Zack and other black men, and it is not possible to clearly demarcate the relationship between Zack and Lucas through the binary of superiority/inferiority that racism demands. There is something fundamentally unspeakable between Zack and Lucas which manifests itself in Lucas's quiet resistance of Zack's racially based authority. As Roth reflects upon his realization of what this unspeakable element is, the reader too is informed what lies beneath: "Then, in adolescence, he knew what he had seen in his father's face that

morning, what shadow, what stain, what mark - something which has happened between Lucas and his father, which nobody but they knew and would ever know if the telling depended on them - something which had happened because they were themselves, men, not stemming from any difference of race nor because one blood strain ran in them both" (111-12). The problem between Zack and Lucas, which is the source of the quiet animosity, is not simply relegated to the realm of the racially motivated, because it is not simply racism, but is something else, something which Roth can only detect, but not know, as the telling of it depends upon those who will not tell. However, Roth eventually discerns the source of the conflict between Zack and Lucas: "Then, in his late teens, almost a man, he even knew what it had been. *It was a woman*, he thought. *My father and a nigger, over a woman. My father and a nigger man over a nigger woman*, because he simply declined even to realise that he had even refused to think *a white woman*. He didn't even think Molly's name. That didn't matter. *And by God Lucas beat him*, he thought" (112). A few years after Roth rejects his companionship with Henry in an effort to emulate what he perceives as proper race relations, he realizes that at the core of the relationship between his father Zack, and the 'head slave' Lucas is a disagreement over a "nigger woman" (Lucas's wife Molly) whose identity is irrelevant¹³. As Roth continues thinking:

Edmonds, he thought, harshly and viciously. *Edmonds. Even a nigger McCaslin is a better man, better than all of us. Old Carothers got his nigger bastards right in his back yard and I would like to have seen the husband or anybody else that said him nay. ---Yes, Lucas beat him, else Lucas wouldn't be here. If father had beat Lucas, he couldn't have let*

Lucas stay here even to forgive him. It will only be Lucas who could have stayed because Lucas is impervious to anybody, even to forgiving them, even to having to harm them. (112)

Roth's realization that his father was "beat" by Lucas necessarily takes recourse to genealogy for explanation: what becomes of greater priority here, for Roth, is not what Zack and Lucas are competing over, or the moral or ethical implications of this competition, but rather that Zack's loss is inevitable since he is a McCaslin through maternity, and thus no competition for Lucas who is paternally linked to old Carothers. In Roth's systematization of their relationship, Lucas's blackness is recognized as an inferiority, but is necessarily subordinated to his paternal heritage and his being a male McCaslin.

Earlier in the story, the reader is informed the "something more" at the heart of the relationship between Zack and Lucas is the battle to lay claim to Mollie. As Lucas approaches Roth's house in the present tense of the novel, he reflects back, in vivid detail, to his confrontation with Zack over Molly. While Roth was being born during a torrential rain storm, Zack sent for Molly for assistance with the birth and sent Lucas to fetch the doctor. As Lucas returns, he finds Zack's wife dead from childbirth, and his own wife Molly moved into the Edmonds' home to take care of the baby Roth and to provide companionship to the now widowed Zack. After six months of living alone, every day tending to the fire in the hearth lit on his wedding day, Lucas confronts Zack and demands that Molly be returned to him. It should be noted, though, that this is simultaneously a reclamation of property, and an assertion of masculinity. Lucas waits for Zack to go to sleep one evening, and sneaks into his house armed with a razor blade,

with the intention of murdering him. It is this confrontation which can never be erased from their collective memory and which will plague their relationship forever, and it is this untellable event that young Roth senses in his father. But this confrontation is not only over Molly, but is also a claim of righteousness as based on lineage to the founding father, Carothers McCaslin. When Lucas stands with his razor in hand at the foot of Zack's bed, he tells him:

“You thought I wouldn't, didn't you?” Lucas said. “You knowed I could beat you, so you thought to beat me with old Carothers, like Cass Edmonds done Isaac: used old Carothers to make Isaac give up the land that was his because Cass Edmonds was the woman-made McCaslin, the woman-branch, the sister, and old Carothers would have told Isaac to give in to the woman-kin that couldn't fend for herself. And you thought I'd do that too, didn't you? You thought I'd do it quick, quicker than Isaac since it aint any land I would give up. I aint got any fine big McCaslin farm to give up...” (55)

As Molly is reduced to little more than property, the conflict here is equated to the conflict between Cass and Ike, and Ike's eventual renunciation of what is rightfully his. In Lucas's formulation of the injustice perpetrated by Zack against him, he necessarily links it to Zack's maternal relation to old Carothers, an implicit sign of inferiority in Lucas's mind. As Lucas continues: “All I got to give up is McCaslin blood that rightfully aint even mine, or at least aint worth much since old Carothers never seemed to miss much what he give to Tomey that night that made my father. And if this is what that McCaslin blood has brought me, I dont want it neither. And if the running of it into my

black blood never hurt him any more than the running of it out is going to hurt me, it wont even be old Carothers that had the most pleasure’” (55-56). Not only does Lucas’s speech hint at the shocking revelation of the sexual relations between old Carothers and the slave woman Tomey, from which Lucas is descended, but also suggests Zack’s claim to the land and old Carothers’ legacy is suspect since he is “woman-descended”. Indeed, even the authority of old Carothers is rejected, as Lucas in his fury states he will enjoy death more than old Carothers could have enjoyed creating life. Lucas’s speech reveals critical insight into the workings of race on old Carothers’ land. As Richard Gray suggests:

Lucas’s contempt for the ‘woman-branch’ of the family, the Edmondses, is in fact equalled by his contempt for someone like Ike McCaslin who, although descended by a male line, allow himself to fall victim to ‘woman-kin’ by repudiating his inheritance - and so, in Lucas’s eyes, turning ‘apostate to his name and lineage’. Lucas is a proud black man, as the narrative presents him, not so much because of pride in his blackness as on account of his white, male status: the fact that he is descended ‘not only by a male line but in only two generations’ from the original founding father. (279)¹⁴

Lucas’s pride, which provides the impetus for his confrontation with Zack Edmonds over Mollie, is rooted in his direct lineage to old Carothers, suggesting this is a confrontation less over racial difference and more over entitlement: Lucas’s paternal lineage to old Carothers necessarily trumps Zack’s maternal descent. But what is of crucial importance here is not the Faulknerian emphasis on patriarchy, but rather the authority placed upon

the relations to old Carothers. Implicit in Gray's discussion is Lucas's belief that he will rightfully succeed the Father before Zack because he is a paternal McCaslin, a belief that quietly engages the process of subject formation. Individual identity is formed through the initial submission to the Law of the Father, which is necessarily followed by eventually assuming the place of the Father, and what is at stake here is the question of who is supposed to succeed, and consequently who is superior. Precisely because the "better" man cannot be dictated by race on the McCaslin land, a necessary recourse to genealogy and proximity to old Carothers must be taken: a symbolic substitution for the 'real' of racial superiority which must be there on the McCaslin land, obscured but always present, allowing for a cognitive handling, and distinction, of all of old Carothers' offspring.

The Ethical Reconciliation of Individual Subjectivity and Race

While the ledgers provide Ike with the impetus to reject his past, and thus require him to constitute a new form of subjectivity, he would seem to be lost within them: if the trauma located in the ledgers provides Ike with his origin of identity, then surely this origin could lay claim to a kind of atemporality in Ike's psyche. As the origin which compels him to maintain an ethical relation to history and his environment - an ethical relation necessarily resulting from an origin of trauma - history, in Go Down, Moses is clearly not some locatable past, but rather an entity very much within the present, constantly guiding and influencing it. The trauma which defines Ike is never behind him. And yet, despite the atemporality of trauma, or of the traumatic historical event, there is a very defined temporality to the ledgers, however imposed and superficial this temporality

may be. To be sure, Ike never returns to the ledgers, and he locates a very specific end to the narrative they weave: "... and that was all because in 1874 his father and his uncle were both dead and the old ledgers never again came down from the shelf above the desk to which his father had returned them for the last time that day in 1869. But he could have completed it:..." (268-69). In much the same way Ike interpolates his own speculative re-creations of the events that surely must have happened, he provides the ledgers with a conclusion, an ending to the history and a terminal direction to their story. His own entry - never recorded but equally important - suggests the logical end of the plot began so long ago by old Carothers, noting "*Lucas Quintus Carothers McCaslin Beauchamp. Last surviving son and child of Tomey's Terrel and Tennie Beauchamp. Match 17, 1784*" (269). For Ike, it is Lucas, almost the exact namesake, of old Carothers, and Carothers' last surviving son through a paternal McCaslin genealogy, who concludes the ledgers. In the narrative Ike lifts from the ledgers, it is Lucas who provides a conclusion to the actions old Carothers began on the "cursed" land so many years ago. As the narrator suggests the importance of Lucas's name,

not *Lucius Quintus @c @c @c*, but *Lucas Quintus*, not refusing to be called Lucius, because he simply eliminated that word from the name; not denying, declining the name itself, because he used three quarters of it; but simply taking the name and changing it, altering it, making it no longer the white man's but his own, by himself composed, himself selfprogenitive and nominate, by himself ancestored, as, for all the old ledgers recorded to the contrary, old Carothers himself was. (269)

Lucas, who cannot take his father's last name - which would logically be McCaslin if he were not the product of miscegenation - is required to take the slave name of his mother¹⁵. And he slightly alters his own name in an effort to declare his independence from old Carothers, as though by changing two letters to one he can effectively re-attribute his own birth to himself. Both Ike and Lucas are third-generation McCaslins, and both attempt to reconstruct their own subjectivity, out of the very specific psychic relations to the real generated by trauma. And it is because of their similarities that Ike defines Lucas as the end of the McCaslin history.

Lucas's confrontation with Zack is nothing short of traumatic¹⁶. As Lucas stands over Zack, the murder he has come to perform seems to have already happened: "in the first of light he mounted the white man's front steps and entered the unlocked front door and traversed the silent hall and entered the bedroom *which it seemed to him he had already entered* and that only an instant before, standing with the open razor above the breathing, the undefended and defenseless throat, *facing again the act which it seemed to him he had already performed*" (emphasis mine 51). Like the traumatic event which demands a repeated revisiting of it, this murder has seemingly already happened, the very potential for it possibly traumatic in and of itself. But it is the speech Lucas gives to Zack that the various discursive strands of the novel come forth:

You knowed I wasn't afraid, because you knowed I was a McCaslin too and a man-made one. And you never thought that, because I am a McCaslin too, I wouldn't. You never even thought that, because I am a nigger too, I wouldn't dare. No. You thought that because I am a nigger I wouldn't even mind. I never figured on the razor neither. But I have you

your chance. Maybe I didn't know what I might have done when you walked in my door, but I knowed what I wanted to do, what I believed I was going to do, what Carothers McCaslin would have wanted me to do. But you didn't come. You never even gave me the chance to do what old Carothers would have told me to do. You tried to beat me. And you wont never, not even when I am hanging dead from the limb this time tomorrow with the coal oil still burning, you wont never." (52)

Lucas suggests that he has beaten Zack once and for all, even when he is "hanging dead from the limb... with the coal oil still burning", anticipating the lynching that will be sure to follow should he kill Zack. John T. Matthews writes that "...Lucas relies on an ideology of... self-realization to formulate his response to the very practices that have put him where he is" (31)¹⁷. What Matthews makes explicit is that Lucas's attitude towards his circumstances - the racism that has taken his wife away from him - is one of acceptance. Indeed, Lucas seems uniquely capable of accepting his existence and even death. In this sense, he stands in stark contrast to Ike who believes that his repudiation of his inheritance will somehow free him from the constraints of history and ultimately death. And because Lucas is "himself selfprogenitive," or at least attempts to define himself according to these parameters, he is capable of occupying a subject position which emphasizes the interconnectedness of history and self, and demonstrates that race in Go Down, Moses is ultimately dealt with ethically. Since Lucas is a "nigger McCaslin", but a "man-made" one, he exists as the locus of the various discursive strands in the novel, and engages a completely unique position on race in the text. Because of his paternal relations to old Carothers, Lucas should be able to become the (figurative)

Father, but is incapable of doing so because of his blackness: where Ike renounces the Father by choice, it is mandatory for Lucas to do so; this is, presumably, why he alters his name.

In the traumatic formation of identity, there resides the individual desire to compromise the self, as manifested through psychic castration, to evade punishment from the Father. But in this confrontation with Zack, Lucas attempts to reclaim his relation to the(ir) Father, endowing himself with an authority and superior subjectivity which confronts the (un)ethical relations to race on the McCaslin land. In returning to the Father, with the intention of ascending to his role, what Lucas does is not only place himself in a superior position to Zack in the competition for historical validity, but he also subverts the very signification process of race on the land: he commits to an alternate ethics, one that will allow for a bypassing of racist attitudes and will allow him to declare a position for himself not otherwise available. Unlike Ike who attempts to achieve the same goal by simply renouncing everything, Lucas confronts the epistemology of race on the McCaslin land directly, and re-negotiates the entire symbolic and ethical link to the 'real' of racial difference.

* * *

Suggesting that Faulkner's polemical intention with Go Down, Moses is to re-write the nature of race relations so that the ethical element is not only accented, but located as the residence of these relations is, perhaps, to commit a series of logical errors. To argue an ethical agenda in Faulkner's work might limit the possibility for multiple

readings, or even worse, stand as an impossibility in the face of Faulkner's own ambivalent attitude towards race, which has been well-documented¹⁸. But in reading this system of ethics in relation to the repeated use of the figure of psychic trauma - a figure used both in his characterization and his approach to history - alleviates some of these concerns. After all, if one commits to the importance of trauma in Faulkner's writing, and particularly in relation to the formation of individual identity (whether in the primal scene or some other stage in a character's life) then surely the ethical implications of trauma take on a certain importance. What is more important in Go Down, Moses is how these ethical implications unify the text and enable coherent critical intervention. From the perversely comical, unethical race relations of slavery in "Was" to the illegal gambling by Samuel Beauchamp in "Go Down, Moses", the ethics involved in treatment of racial difference is where the potential for racism lies. And while this may seem self-evident, it is, in fact, not. Racial difference is not an empirical reality, but rather a system of relations, malleable like all cultural constructs. Faulkner's polemic - the point of Go Down, Moses - engages history and individual identity, presenting them as points on a continuous spectrum: history is as 'present' as the individual who studies it. And it is the atemporal nature of trauma which makes this notion explicit, but which also requires the individual to refigure his consciousness to understand the traumatic. The artificiality of racial difference, as literalized in the same genealogical origin for all characters in the novel regardless of skin color, is exposed. This breakdown of difference is nothing short of traumatic. And like all trauma it requires a psychic refiguring. It is in this refiguration that an ethical relationship to the 'real' - to the traumatic event of race itself - must occur.

Notes

Introduction: Faulkner, Race, and Trauma (pp. 1-9)

¹ William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!, (Toronto: Random House, 1986)

² John T. Matthews, "Faulkner and Proletarian Literature," Faulkner in Cultural Context, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997) 166-90.

³ Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," American Imago 48.1 (1991): 1-12.

⁴ Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

1 - The Traumatic Subversion of Language in Light in August (pp. 10 - 43)

¹ William Faulkner, Light in August (Toronto: Random House, 1985).

² Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Modern Literary Theory: A Reader, Third Edition, ed. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 53-60.

³ Doreen Fowler, "Law and Desire in Light in August," Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1997) 64-94. I am seriously indebted throughout this project to the work of Doreen Fowler. Her psychoanalytic perspective on Faulkner's work is not only thorough scholarship, but tremendously fascinating as well, and provides, I believe, the most comprehensive readings of Faulkner's writings. Here, in her essay "Law and Desire in Light in August" (The Return of the Repressed, Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1997. 64-94), she makes the point that the three central narratives of Light - i.e. the stories of Joe Christmas, Reverend Hightower and Lena Grove - are allegories of how individual subjectivity is constituted. The Faulknerian interest in locating the individual's existence in relation to the community is most explicitly manifested in Light and, for Fowler and myself, it is most easily articulated through the language of psychoanalysis.

⁴ Karl E. Jirgens, "Jacques-Marie Emile Lacan," Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory, ed. Irene K. Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 396-99.

⁵ Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," Yale French Studies 55-56 (1977): 338-95. Jameson's point is not dissimilar to my own. He seeks to reconcile Marxism and Psychoanalysis in a way that will articulate the 'subject' as implicitly embedded in a

variety of social frameworks, specifically speech. Jameson's locating of the individual in a social framework is not as self-evident as it may appear, and through a number of elaborate theoretical turns, he manages to engage these two seemingly antagonistic discourses.

⁶ Ellman Crasnow, "Semiotics," A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms, ed. Roger Fowler (New York: Routledge, 1987) 216-19.

⁷ Gregor Campbell, "Signified/Signifier/Signification," Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory, ed. Irene K. Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 627.

⁸ Donald M. Kartiganer, "'What I Choose to Be': Freud, Faulkner, Joe Christmas and the Abandonment of Design," Faulkner and Psychology: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1991, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) 288-314. Kartiganer suggests that Light is ultimately a novel about not knowing origins. In much the same way that Freud in his own writing denied the existence of a tangible, or at least discernible, origin, for example the ambiguous reality of the primal scene, Faulkner in Light denies the possibility of Joe's specific origin. Joe is condemned to not know: his origin is irretrievable.

⁹ Richard Gray, "Language, Power and the Verbal Community: Light in August," The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996) 177-93. Gray's article also briefly discusses the "death of language" (187) in Light and is worth reading for those who seek to explore the use of non-verbal language in the novel. From the prostitute's scream to the soldier's muffled cry upon realization of Grimm's castration of Joe, I would suggest that this non-verbal language functions as a parallel discourse to speech in the novel, and one that somehow approximates the horrific events in the novel more closely.

¹⁰ Michael Millgate, William Faulkner, (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961). Millgate writes "the core of the novel is the story of Joe Christmas... [Joe] never knows the truth of the matter, and neither do we, but he is perpetually made aware of society's inflexible requirement that a man be *either* white *or* Negro and act accordingly. Christmas looks white, and society is ready to accept him as such, but some compulsion drives him again and again to say that he is a Negro" (45).

¹¹ James A. Snead, "Light in August and the Rhetorics of Racial Division," Faulkner and Race, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987) 152-69. Snead's work here focusses on how Faulkner is ultimately engaged in a kind of anti-racist work through the use of socially conscious narratives. Examining both Faulkner and the narratologist Genette, Snead writes Genette's "meditations... apply to the author who would both describe and 'write-against' large-scale ideological figures of *social* as well as *narrative* discourse" (154). Snead's work is crucial to my essay, and I believe that in characterizing Faulkner as someone dedicated to social change (however creative the fashion), he has correctly identified the essence of Faulkner's work. While

Faulkner was certainly no social reformer during his writing of Light, his social awareness cannot be overlooked and must be considered in 'reading' it.

¹² See Arnold Weinstein, "Fusion and Confusion in Light in August," The Faulkner Journal 1.2 (Spring 1986): 2-16.

¹³ See Heinz Ickstadt, "The Discourse of Race and the 'Passing' Text: Faulkner's Light in August," Amerikastudien-American Studies 42.4 (1997): 529-36. Ickstadt writes "since the segregated South is only the extreme variant of a symbolic system that constitutes its social and cultural hierarchies through oppositions and exclusions, passing, 'logically,' is the ultimate danger, the invisible enemy that potentially undermines all oppositions and thus calls the very principles not only of the existing order but of all order-making into doubt" (531).

¹⁴ See Alwyn Berland, Light in August: A Study of Black and White, (Don Mills, Canada: Maxwell Macmillan Canada Inc., 1992) 72-81. Berland provides a more clearly delineated examination of how stereotypes function in the novel.

¹⁵ What I am suggesting here is that the novel is a narrative organized around absence. Joe's true origin is absent from the text. From here, I believe the 'plot' of the novel extends outwards, and all of its flashbacks and complications radiate from this original absence. For a more detailed examination of how plot functions in relation to narrative in the novel, see Martin Kreisworth, "Plots and Counterplots: The Structure of Light in August," New Essays on Light in August, ed. Michael Millgate (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1987) 55-80.

¹⁶ See Andre Bleikasten, "Light in August: The Closed Society and its Subjects," New Essays on Light in August, ed. Michael Millgate (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1987) 81-102. Much of my own work is preceded by this piece.

¹⁷ This to me is the point of Light. It seeks to illuminate the erroneous, and harmful, thinking that occurs through binarizing aspects of identity. The black/white problem in the novel is quite similar to the male/female problems of identity. And, the similarities between black men and white women are both apparent and crucial, for in the text they both threaten the authority of white men: they are the sites of resistance and challenge the 'normal' way of life. I am indebted to a variety of criticism which examines the role of women in Light, particularly: Alwyn Berland, Light in August: A Study of Black and White, (Don Mills, Canada: Maxwell Macmillan Canada Inc., 1992); Andre Bleikasten, The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner's Novels from The Sound and the Fury to Light in August, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 275-335; Hoke Perkins, "'Ah Just Cant Quit Thinking': Faulkner's Black Razor Murderers," Faulkner and Race, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987) 222-35; Judith Bryant Wittenberg, "The Women of Light in August," New Essays on Light in August, ed. Michael Millgate, (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1987) 103-22.

¹⁸ For the change in the treatment of the mulatto in fiction, see Gena McKinley, "Light in August: A Novel of Passing?," Faulkner in Cultural Context, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997) 148-65.

¹⁹ See Lee Clinton Jenkins, "Faulkner, the Mythic Mind, and the Blacks," William Faulkner's Light in August: A Critical Casebook, ed. Francois L. Pitavy (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982). 135-40.

²⁰ Kai Erickson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," Trauma: Explorations in Memory, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 183-99.

²¹ Fredrick L. Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, ed. Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-58, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959.

2 - Inventing the Historical, and Traumatic, Event: Absalom, Absalom! (pp. 44-79)

¹ William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (Toronto: Random House, 1986).

² Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984).

³ Mario J. Valdes, "Reference / Referent," Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory, ed. Irene K. Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 618-19.

⁴ For a compelling examination of "transgenerational haunting" see Nicholas Abraham, "Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology," trans. Nicholas Rand, The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis, ed. Francoise Meltzer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 75-80. In this brief essay, Abraham suggests the psychoanalytic phenomenon of the phantom "*returns to haunt [and] bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other*" (78-79). I suspect that Quentin suffers from a haunting such as this, in that he inherits the experience of the father (or grandfather) in that he is required to bear witness to Sutpen's legacy. Quentin suffers from a psychic haunting which transcends the temporal distance between generations and very much makes him a victim, in the present, of the crimes of the past.

⁵ Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996).

⁶ Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

⁷ Kai Erickson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," Trauma: Explorations in Memory, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 183-99.

⁸ Frederick R. Karl, "Race, History and Technique in Absalom, Absalom!," Faulkner and Race, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987) 209-21.

⁹ For a more in-depth examination of how femininity (or feminine identity) functions in relation to the Sutpen legacy (or the Faulknerian narrativizing of history), see Leslie Heywood, "The Shattered Glass: The Blank Space of Being in Absalom, Absalom!," The Faulkner Journal 3.2 (Spring 1988): 12-23, and Jenny Jennings Foerst, "The Psychic Wholeness and Corrupt Text of Rosa Coldfield, 'Author and Victim Too' of Absalom, Absalom!," The Faulkner Journal: Faulkner and Feminisms 4.1-2 (Fall 1991): 37-52. Both essays, psychoanalytically informed, attempt to create a space in the novel through which women speak of their experience. Heywood focusses on the manner in which female identity is positioned in a paternal structure, more often than not forcing the various female characters of Absalom! to articulate their (feminine) reality as a void, or a nothing which fails to register within the masculine system of identity presented in the text. Foerst, on the other hand, suggests Rosa is the ultimate authority in the re-telling of the Sutpen story, a mad-woman who stands in stark contrast to the Compson's alleged order. But this is a madness which provides a feminine performativity that privileges silence and ultimately provides the most accessible (or least convoluted) route into history.

¹⁰ Carolyn Porter, "Symbolic Fathers and Dead Mothers: A Feminist Approach to Faulkner," Faulkner and Psychology, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994) 78-122. In an interesting examination of the relationship between fathers and daughters in Faulkner's work, and Porter seeks to demonstrate how conventional Faulknerian criticism which seeks to identify the role of the Father in Faulkner's work can be used to identify the role of the (M)other too.

¹¹ William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (Toronto: Random House, 1990)

¹² Karen Ann Butery, "From Conflict to Suicide: The Inner Turmoil of Quentin Compson," American Journal of Psychoanalysis 49.3 (Sept. 1989): 211-24.

¹³ For a more comprehensive examination of the role of incest in Faulkner's work, see John T. Irwin, Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1975). Irwin's work suggests that Quentin's failure as lover/brother of Caddy is ultimately a failure of masculinity for Quentin. See also, Karl F. Zender, "Faulkner and the Politics of Incest," American Literature 70.4 (Dec. 1998) 739-765. Zender suggests that incest is a motif for Faulkner which changes throughout his career, and that "incest... always remains tragic, never becoming unambiguously a trope for psychic or social liberation. What happens instead is a steady increase in the complexity of Faulkner's treatment of the motif as his career advances - an increase in his awareness that the causes (and costs) of sexual inhibition are social and historical as well as psychological" (746).

¹⁴See John T. Matthews, "Faulkner and Proletarian Literature," Faulkner in Cultural Context, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997) 166-90. In trying to read Faulkner from a Marxist perspective, i.e. Faulkner engaged in the class struggle, Matthews pays particular attention to the form and style of Absalom!. He writes that "Faulkner - through the means afforded by a modernist aesthetic - formalizes ways of thinking and experiencing that shake or deconstruct this economic logic. To begin with: the body of Absalom's language. Stylistic excess itself rebukes abstraction. Faulkner's language possesses all the uniqueness of an individual body" (184-85). Matthews attempts to demonstrate how the individual in Faulkner is necessarily embedded in the social relations of power, and it is these power relations that shape and mould individual identity.

¹⁵Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989) 436-43.

¹⁶ Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

¹⁷ See Ulfred Reichardt, "Perceiving and Representing Slavery and 'Race' *Through Time*: William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!," Amerikastudien-American-Studies 42.4 (1997): 613-24. Reichardt suggests that "the reconstruction of Southern history in the novel, comprising slavery as a crucial factor, is represented as the intersection of two forms of alterity - between the present and the past *and* between white and black characters. Both alterities, however, are doubled by the fact that the novel itself represents the past, and furthermore, itself inevitably employs 'racial' categories in representing the characters' views of 'race'" (615). Foregrounding the temporal element implicit in Absalom!, Reichardt makes the crucial point that the narrative focussed around this "unspeakable center" of slavery is necessarily an exercise in complicated temporality - the oscillation between past and present - as there is seemingly no other way to approach this center.

¹⁸See Doreen Fowler, "Reading for the Repressed," Faulkner: Return of the Repressed, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997) 95-127. Again, I am heavily indebted to Fowler's work. She writes about "pool-and-pebble metaphor" that "there is no separate Shreve, Quentin, or Father because there is no difference" (113). My own analysis of Quentin's allegory relies on this essential blending of identity and time, and is drawn from Fowler's essay.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Fixations to Traumas - The Unconscious," Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis, trans. James Strachey, ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards (Toronto: Penguin, 1991) 313-27.

²⁰ On the relation between Father and Son in terms of miscegenation, see Philip M. Weinstein, "Miscegenation and Might-Have-Been: Absalom, Absalom! and Jazz," What Else But Love?: The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and Morrison (New York: Columbia

University Press, 1996) 145-55. It is fascinating intertextual study of how both authors figure miscegenation and fatherhood in their respective texts.

²¹ See Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "William Faulkner: Why the Very *Idea!*," Faulkner and Ideology, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi) 329-52. Rubin writes, "Absalom, Absalom! is a tricky affair... there has been much argument concerning how Quentin found out that Charles Bon was Thomas Sutpen's son, and also that Bon was part black in ancestry - *if* he was. It is an interesting controversy. My assumption has always been that when he went out to Sutpen's Hundred with Miss Rosa Coldfield to see the dying Henry Sutpen, Quentin also saw Clytie, Sutpen's daughter by a slave woman, and, recognizing in her African physiognomy the family resemblance to the white Henry Sutpen, he deduced what the missing ingredient in the mystery of Charles Bon's murder was" (340).

²²For an examination of how the mulatto functions in "national" fiction, see Barbara Ladd, "'The Direction of the Howling': Nationalism and the Color Line in Absalom, Absalom!," American Literature, 66.3 (Sept. 1994): 525-51. Ladd ultimately sees the mulatto as a trope for fear of national degeneration, writing that "in identifying the octoroon as a French or Spanish creole is strategic and points to questions and anxieties that the white southerner had about his or her own future in a nationalistic and increasingly imperialistic United States... the personal history of the octoroon - his or her origin in a slave culture, alienation from the father, even the memory of a dead, sometimes anonymous, or monstrosly rendered mother - is a psychologized recapitulation of the nationalist narrative; the octoroon's tragic fate, typically death or exile to Europe, is the destiny that always attends the past in any dream of U.S. redemptive nationalism" (526).

3 - The Ethical Relations of Race, History, and Identity in Go Down, Moses (pp. 80-110)

¹ See Dirk Kuyk, Jr., Threads Cable-strong: William Faulkner's Go Down, Moses (East Brunswick, New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1983). Through structuralist analysis, Kuyk, Jr. attempts to unify the "fabula" of the novel within a coherent narrative that spans the artificial boundaries of its separate, individual stories.

² William Faulkner, Go Down, Moses (Toronto: Random House, 1990).

³ Mapping out the McCaslin genealogy is remarkably difficult, perhaps more so than one would suspect. I have relied upon Dorothy Tuck's, "The McCaslin Genealogy," Bear, Man, and God: Eight Approaches to William Faulkner's "The Bear", Second Edition, ed. F.L. Utley, L.Z. Bloom and A. F. Kinney (New York: Random House, 1971) 310-11. Tuck's genealogical chart not only provides a clearly elucidated listing of old Carothers McCaslin's descendants, but also provides an all-important denotation of the racialized make-up of his black offspring, i.e. to what percentage they are black.

⁴Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996).

⁵ Doreen Fowler, "Renouncing the Phallus: Go Down, Moses," Faulkner: Return of the Repressed (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997) 128-65. Fowler's approach to Go Down, Moses is not entirely dissimilar to my own. Through her use of psychoanalytic principles - specifically the repeated renunciation of the phallus by various characters throughout the novel - she seeks to find a methodology for reading that will allow for the coherence of the diverse stories in the novel. Rather than suggesting a particular story or theme unifies the short stories into a novel, she reads the primary male characters as engaging in denial, particularly the denial of self which is the inevitable byproduct of the castration complex. The lack created by this complex is often not filled by these male characters in the novel. For example, Ike's inability to love his wife prevents him from becoming "whole" again, as most men do, psychoanalytically speaking, when they engage the other.

⁶ For a fascinating account of how slavery is articulated throughout Faulkner's work, see Philip M. Weinstein, "Diving Into the Wreck: Faulknerian Practice and the Imagination of Slavery," The Faulkner Journal 10.2 (1995): 23-53. Here, Weinstein traces how slavery is represented in a number of Faulkner works, including Go Down, Moses as a reality that always looms in the background, casting its shadow over the present that attempts to deal with it.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Fixations to Trauma - The Unconscious," Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, trans. James Strachey, ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1991) 313-26.

⁸ See James Early, The Making of Go Down, Moses (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1972). Early writes "Isaac's refuge is, in a sense, in the past. His relation to the past is ambiguous. At the same time he believes he has freed himself from his particular, tainted, ancestral past, he wishes to regain another past, ideal, primitive... McCaslin denies the possibility of escape from the morally ambiguous present and from the past that produced it" (55). Early, here, highlights the temporal negotiations Ike must necessarily participate in, in order to simultaneously recognize the past, but act in the present the way he would like to.

⁹ See Sergei Chakovsky, "Lucas Beauchamp and Jim: Mark Twain's Influence on William Faulkner," Faulkner and Race, ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987) 236-54. Chakovsky rightly notes Ike's ambivalence to the crimes of the past, and to his own actions which are response to these crimes, saying "Ike's [words reflect] utter moral confusion, a kind of inevitable retribution of 'this land' on the one who abnegated it for ostensibly laudable moral reasons. And still, as the last lines obviously stand for the most part as a euphemism for black-white relations, the 'thinning' color line between races, one is tempted to pose the

unavoidable question: To what extent does Faulkner share Ike's sentiments? Does *he* 'care'?" (246). The similarities between Ike's attitudes towards race, and Faulkner's, are difficult to overlook, and I suspect a certain amount of biographical criticism, which I have avoided, is necessary to fully characterize Ike's views.

¹⁰ See Glenn Meeter, "Molly's Vision: Lost Cause Ideology and Genesis in Faulkner's Go Down, Moses," Faulkner and Ideology, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995) 277-96. Meeter makes explicit what I am implicitly suggesting, writing that "the heritage Ike repudiates is represented by the commissary ledgers and, above all, the history of slavery that they contain. It is a representative history in that it records...the worse of slavery as an institution, in the founding McCaslin's incest with his own slave-born daughter... Ike sees slavery as a curse, one that was brought upon the South by whites" (288).

¹¹ Caruth's work on the ethical relation to the real comes out of her analysis of Lacan's interpretation of Freud's analysis of "dream of a father who has lost his child and who dreams about this child in the night" (Caruth 92). In the dream, the child is burning and attempts to wake the father to receive help, though the father will not awaken. Through a detailed analysis of the nature of the dream itself, she concludes that the father's inability to wake during the dream is his desire to sustain the life of the child, if only temporarily and within the dream itself, and at the expense of the child's burning. What is important here is that the father's identity as father is bound up with the child's imaginary suffering/real death. The father, in the dream, is conflicted over whether or not he should end the suffering of the child by waking, or prolong the child's suffering in order to see him a little longer. This is the ethical dilemma at the heart of the father's identity and his relation to the child. As the dead child stands distinct from the very alive father, the gap between them - the 'real' of their relationship - is a gap that can only be crossed through a mediation of desire and ethics on the part of the father. Hence the formulation that the relationship to the 'real' is ultimately an ethical one.

¹² Alan Sheridan, "Translator's Note," Ecrits by Jacques Lacan (New York: Norton, 1977).

¹³ See Minrose Gwin, "Her Shape, His Hand: The Spaces of African American Women in Go Down, Moses," ed. Linda Wagner-Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 73-100. Gwin provides a symbol-based intervention into Faulkner narrative studies which overlook the manner in which African American women are represented in Faulkner's fiction. Gwin suggests it is these representations, or symbolizations, of black women that simultaneously engage the patriarchal master narrative and resist it. She suggests the symbol of the African American woman "both performs and transgresses the material and cultural spaces of region and country, and their attendant ideological permutations" (96).

¹⁴ Richard Gray, The Life of William Faulkner (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996). Gray also suggests that "...Lucas appears to be more of a McCaslin than of the McCaslins and

more white, even, than the whites. Somehow, conflict has been bleached out of him" (280). Since the conflict between Zack and Lucas is less racial, and more about masculinity, it is inevitable then that Lucas would try and denigrate Zack by suggesting his maternal relation to old Carothers. The axes of gender and race are inseparable in the novel: this is a novel about genealogy more than anything else, and on the "cursed" McCaslin land genealogy simultaneously subsumes both race and gender. I have attempted to single out the racial conflicts in Go Down, Moses for my own critical purposes, and to facilitate my argument.

¹⁵ See Constance Hill-Hall, Incest in Faulkner: A Metaphor for the Fall (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986). Hill-Hall writes "the problems of self-definition in incest and miscegenation, already acute, are worsened by the role violations both relationships incur. A daughter may be compelled to double as her father's mistress or 'wife,' like Tomasina of Go Down, Moses... Similarly, the mulatto carrying in his veins the blood of master and slave, conquered and conqueror, is torn in two opposing directions" (67).

¹⁶ Implicit throughout my work is the belief that trauma is the unifying element of Go Down, Moses. Both Ike and Lucas are participate in traumatic events which are the most important events in their characterizations in the novel. This is a break with conventional scholarship on Go Down, Moses which more often than not insists that a particular story in the novel is what solidifies Go Down, Moses, into a novel form. While I suggest "The Bear" achieves this aim, the most convincing scholarship of this kind suggests "Pantaloone in Black", which focusses on the black male Rider Strong and his response to the recent death of his wife, is the novel's center. Both Hoke Perkins' "'Ah Just Cant Quit Thinking': Faulkner's Black Razor Murderers," Faulkner and Race: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1986. Ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997) 222-35 and John Limon's "The Integration of Go Down, Moses," Critical Inquiry, 12 (Winter 1986) 422-38 make strong arguments for "Pantaloone in Black" to be considered this way. But, at the heart of even this story is the trauma of the death of the other, and any reading of this story must necessarily be subsumed under the rubric of trauma theory in an attempt to deal with it fully.

¹⁷ John T. Matthews, "Touching Race in Go Down, Moses," New Essays on Go Down, Moses, ed. Linda Wagner-Martin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 21-48. Matthews work aims to read Go Down, Moses as a novel about the economic practices of the South, particularly the bootlegging of liquor. While his goal is a significantly different reading of the book than my own, he makes the crucial point that Lucas aims to be (economically) independant. I believe this independance is such that it resonates within the very process of subject formation: Lucas's independance exists because he conceives of himself in a unique way: one that simultaneously acknowledges the Law of the Father, and renounces the Father altogether.

¹⁸ See Russell Warren Howe, "A Talk with William Faulkner," Bear, Man and God: Eight Approaches to William Faulkner's "The Bear" Second Edition, ed. F.L. Utley, L.Z. Bloom and A.F. Kinney (New York: Random House, 1971). Here Faulkner makes

explicit his “go slow” attitude towards racial integration in the South, an ambivalent blend of Southern racism and white liberal politics.

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