WONDER. GO ON AND WONDER: QUENTIN'S TRAGEDY FROM THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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“WONDER. GO ON AND WONDER”:
QUENTIN’S TRAGEDY FROM THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

Huang Min

A Dissertation
Presented to
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ABSTRACT

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Quentin’s Tragedy from the Sociological Perspective

by
Huang Min

A major hero in the works of William Faulkner, Quentin Compson used to be one of the most frequently commented characters. Regarding his death, there are a variety of critical opinions. Yet very few critical works have devoted to a thorough study of Quentin’s tragedy. The result is that voices on this issue are presented within the different concerns of critics and tend to overstate one aspect of the problem. The diversified opinions contribute much to the unsettled argument and the complexity of Quentin’s death itself. For want of a better argument, the critical world has paid considerably less attention to Quentin’s suicide over the last 30 years.

My dissertation has tried to approach Quentin’s tragedy in a more systematic and consistent way by the adaptation of a sociological perspective, which has seen the accumulation of well-defined studies on
the problem of suicide since Sociologist Durkheim’s monumental book *Suicides* published well over a century ago. It is from this discipline of social science that the present paper gains a theoretical framework for laying down the fundamental questions regarding Quentin’s death, in an attempt to objectively define and examine the development of his character and suicidal mentality.

First of all, the sociological theories locate man in society and view his choice of suicide in the context of his relationships to individuals and social forces around him. Durkheim concluded that “suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual forms a part” (210). Based on this premise, the present paper proposes that Quentin’s suicide must be explained by referring to multiple causes that reduce Quentin’s degree of integration as a social man and expose him to higher suicide tendency.

Secondly, my discussion of Quentin’s tragedy has attempted to account for two questions raised by the French sociologist Jean Baechler: because and in-order-to. Baechler argued that an adequate answer to a man’s suicide cannot be accomplished without an exploration of the circumstances of suicide as well as the meaning of the action (53). As for the breaking down of circumstances surrounding a man’s suicide, sociological studies have tested and discovered a causal relationship
between suicidal tendency and factors such as ways of life, family disorganization, sibling position, child-rearing techniques (Taylor, *Sociology of Suicide* 128). These findings offer me the methodological framework into which I will organize the topics and develop the argument chapter-by-chapter.

Based on the sociological findings, I have planned for the present work to fall into five chapters. The concern with the broader social variables will be developed in the first two chapters. The concept of social isolation or alienation is at the core of Chapter One as I try to examine the growth of Quentin Compson through the comparison of him with one other character, Rosa Coldfield, in their native Southern community. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how Quentin has integrated, or rather, isolated himself from his southern community so as to prepare him for his final choice.

Rosa and Quentin, despite their differences in age, sex and community status, actually share some essential similarities, like their preoccupations about love, family and Southern history. Quentin’s encounter with Rosa in *Absalom, Absalom!* is significant in that it serves both as the passing on of cultural, communal knowledge, and as an example of communication on a deeper level that addresses existential problems between a Southern society and its individuals. Rosa’s
perception of her life as an unremitting struggle to fit in with the prescribed roles that the Southern community demands of a woman foreshadows Quentin’s frustrated attempts to cope with his immediate environment. The chapter thus argues that Quentin’s failure to recognize bondage and ruin in Rosa’s interpretation of Sutpen’s story and of her life points forward to his failure to explore meanings within his own community, which is the first of a series of preoccupations Quentin has on his mind and remains unresolved throughout his life.

Chapter Two will be looking at the problem of race, another cultural variable at the deeper consciousness of Quentin and surfaces time and again in the stories of The Sound and the Fury, and Absalom, Absalom! A few characters and symbols will be explored to account for the multiple factors at work in Quentin’s racial awareness. For example, a comparison is given to Quentin and his brother Jason to prove the essential agreement in their attitudes towards Negroes. In the course of probing into the problem of Quentin’s awareness of the racial issue, Chapter Two proposes the idea that Quentin comes closer to the average man in the South who is strongly influenced by racial stereotypes, and meanwhile, remains ambivalent in his attitude about the inherit injustices on the racial issue. That Quentin is caught between these two forces prepares him for the agonizing traumas that he feels about his own existence.
Chapter Three takes a look at the family Quentin grows up in and finds the environment a disorganized one in sociological terms. The lack of parental guidance and emotional support is devastating to a sensitive youth who retreats to family for meaning of existence. Quentin’s father, Mr. Compson, is unable to offer him moral support and further devastates Quentin’s sense of parental recognition for what he is capable of. Quentin’s mother, Mrs. Compson, on the other hand, is felt by Quentin to treat him only in terms of her personal obsessions. As time passes, Quentin is aware that he is losing even that small part of sympathy from his mother. The realization of his parents’ failure plays great havoc with Quentin’s life and pushes him into worse turmoil about where he belongs.

Following the discussion on how Quentin perceives the influence of his parents, there will be one chapter examining Quentin’s relationship with his sister Caddy, the last remaining relationship which seems to preoccupy Quentin’s consciousness. I would maintain that neither the code of honor nor the incest fantasy reflects Quentin’s central problem with Caddy. Rather, it is Caddy’s ability to understand, love and sympathize with Quentin that draws her brother to her. Quentin’s urge to hold onto this levering point in life is most evident in his choice of suicide time. Neither Caddy’s loss of virginity nor Quentin’s shameful defeat at the hands of Dalton Ames spurs his desire to take his own life. Quentin
does so only after Caddy is married away, a fact that cuts short the possibility of sustaining the last human bond for Quentin.

Chapter Five tries to approach the problem of Quentin’s tragedy from another angle, by comparing his circumstances with other Faulknerian heroes of similar backgrounds. Tracing the growth of young men in Faulkner’s later works, the last chapter demonstrates that Faulkner’s descriptions of the young protagonists ranging from Quentin to Ike, Chick and lastly Lucius revealed a more positive attitude in terms of their relations with the surrounding circumstances. At the same time, Faulkner showed little change in his perception of the young heroes that they are inevitably the products of their societies. In this group of characters, it is interesting to see that none of them die. The later heroes as a group confirm the sociological discovery that some benevolent influence from community or family members will help one better integrate into society and reduce the risk of suicide. In *Go Down, Moses*, Ike McCaslin’s severance from family sins is the result of Sam Father’s leading him into the larger community of wilderness. Chick Mallison in *Intruder in the Dust*, assisted by a few sympathetic friends, is able to transcend racially stereotypical bias and save a black man’s life. Lastly, Lucius Priest proves himself a responsible young man even in unfavorable circumstances, thanks to the good influence from his family, his black
companion Ned, and the women in the brothel such as Miss Reba and Corrie. Therefore, towards the end of his career, Faulkner's novels such as *Intruder in the Dust* or *The Reivers* suggest a positive correlation between a hero's ability to survive and the ability of those around him to endure and exercise constructive influence.

Through probing into the struggles and central preoccupations of the later Faulknerian boy heroes who better anchor themselves in reality, the present research tries to strengthen the conclusion that Quentin's tragedy is the consequence of his gradual alienation from his environment. No individual cause has been sufficient on its own to explain the reason for Quentin's suicide. Hence his death must be explained in view of multiple social forces at work around him in the post-bellum South, which probably can account for the diverse and sometimes conflicting views accumulated on this issue so far.
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<tr>
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<td>BB</td>
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<td>CS</td>
<td><em>Collected Stories</em></td>
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<td>GDM</td>
<td><em>Go Down, Moses</em></td>
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<td>ID</td>
<td><em>Intruder in the Dust</em></td>
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<td><em>The Reivers</em></td>
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Introduction

Traditionally, there are basically two approaches to tackle the problem of Quentin Compson as a character. The first one is to place him in the context of Southern culture, emphasizing a gentleman’s honor, family roles and duties, and the father-son relationship. This approach is a widely adopted one in the mid-20th century, and has its influential critics such as Robert P. Warren and Cleanth Brooks. The criticism accumulated in this period has shaped some of the widely recognized understandings of Quentin as a character. The second wave of research found support in the psychoanalytical theory and made use of the Freudian concepts for character analysis. The focus of studies, then, is on psychological implications of human relationships and identities. The 1980s saw the arrival of more diversified criticism such as feminist readings or archetypal studies, but on the whole, the criticism has not drifted away from the findings of two previous approaches.

During my reading and research on Quentin as a character, I have come to notice one subject that has often been touched upon but not yet exhausted, that is, the problem of Quentin’s suicide. The death of Quentin cannot be ignored, and his death is in a way comparable to the “delay” in Hamlet since his death does not come until after he has meditated long

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1 A much detailed discussion of this topic will appear in the second part of the introduction.
and hard on his life. Unlike Hamlet, however, there are relatively fewer discussions devoted to Quentin’s suicide. Remarks on Quentin’s death emerging out of the mid-20th century were done within the different concerns of the critics and led invariably into diverse interpretations. For instance, some critics concluded that the parent-son relationship is responsible for Quentin’s death; others maintained that Quentin’s multiple-identity conflict leads to his despair; still others argued that Quentin dies as a result of his sense of ineffectualness in face of time and change.²

Inspirational as these understanding are, they often appear to be in conflict rather than complement one another, due to a lack of focused and consistent research. The situation reveals a tendency of treating Quentin’s death as a by-product of pursuing other topics. As I have found out, critics approached Quentin’s suicide mostly from their respective concerns and sympathies. But actually, Quentin’s choice of suicide is a primary act in his life, influenced by but not limited to factors like the parent-son and the brother-sister relationships. To better define and study this issue, I would like to introduce my topic in two ways: The first part of the introduction will offer a rough review of the existing criticism concerning Quentin’s death. In the meantime, it tries to analyze, categorize, and interpret a

² Brooks, Warren and Mark Spilka represented a school that emphasizes on parental responsibility; John Irwin upheld the psychoanalytical approach; Critics like Jean-Paul Sartre, Donald M. Kartiganer and John T. Matthews tended to favor a more metaphysical interpretation.
number of representative opinions in terms of their insights and, if I may be permitted to say so, their possible bias. The second part of the introduction will take advantage of sociological findings and concepts which have helped to shape not only some of my fundamental understandings of Quentin's character, his choices and his circumstances, but also the way the present paper is organized and developed.

1. A Review of Critical Opinions Regarding Quentin’s Death

Needless to say, the early studies between 1950s and 60s laid the groundwork for much of the discussions to follow, as some of the critics showed remarkable insight into the decoding of essential elements of fiction in terms of characters and themes in Faulkner’s novels. Consequently, what we have now are important observations from early scholars like Robert Penn Warren, Peter Swiggart, Cleanth Brooks, Jane-Paul Sartre and Melvin Backman, to name just a few. They pointed out Faulkner’s preoccupation with Southern subjects, discussed the heroes’ ineffectualness in facing familial and communal problems, and provided inspirational comments on personality traits, interpersonal relationships as well as the novel’s thematic concerns.

The comments on Quentin Compson’s death also grew out of this earlier period of scholarship. But as time goes on, some of the earlier
criticism is gradually losing hold on the imaginations of later critics. For example, the problem of Quentin Compson’ death was an often-discussed subject in the 1950s, yet critics after 1980s obviously find it less intriguing than their earlier counterparts. The result is that, according to the present research, around the last two decades of the 20th century only a few critical studies appeared to address Quentin’s suicide: Margaret D. Bauer’s article entitled “I Have Sinned in That I Have Betrayed the Innocent Blood’: Quentin’s Recognition of His Guilt” argued the cause of Quentin’s death lies in his recognition that his sister Caddy’s misery comes primarily from his preventing her to unite with her lover Dalton Ames. An essay by Merrill Horton “Quentin Compson’s Suicide: A Source in Balzac” contended that Faulkner might have been inspired by a character in *The Old Maid* when creating Quentin’s suicidal behaviors. A few years earlier than 1980, John T. Irwin offered the famous conclusion from a psychoanalytical perspective, linking Quentin’s motive of suicide to his self-punishment as brother seducer and avenger.

The critics, in their examination of Quentin’s life and character, have tried to probe into a number of questions. For example, what are the motives behind Quentin’s death? Who are responsible for it? And occasionally, is it a conscious act or an unconscious destiny? The present paper is going to outline the critical arguments in two ways. First and
foremost, the factors responsible for Quentin’s choice of ending his life; and secondly, what the suicide means, or what is the symbolic meaning of Quentin’s death. As we will see in the following part, the important criticism on Quentin has more or less touched upon these two questions.

1.1 Reasons for Quentin’s Suicide

The critical stances on Quentin’s suicide have generally constituted three groups: the cultural, the philosophical, and the family studies group. Of the three, the cultural dimension is one of the earliest taken by critics. Prominent scholars like Hyatt H. Waggoner, Cleanth Brooks, and later Michel Gresset voiced their ideas that Quentin, as a son of the Old South, commits suicide because he has been trapped in his memories, that he is devoted to past, idealized values, and that he cannot come to terms with the decay and changes in a defeated South. His death, in a large way, symbolizes the death of the old Southern culture and values. Hyatt H. Waggoner said that “Quentin is ultimately concerned with honor...he locates his values in the past, in the Old South.” Since he “can do no morally significant act, either good or bad,” Quentin “can only exist, for a while, in time and then cease to exist” (52). Cleanth Brooks shared the same idea in *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, stating “Quentin is emotionally committed to the code of honor, but for him the
code has lost its connection with reality” (337). Ultimately, Quentin takes his own life with the knowledge that “he can neither repudiate nor fulfill the claims of the code” (337). Brooks’ opinion is influential and echoed by some of his contemporaries with slight variations. For instance, Michel Gresset expanded Brooks’ argument, concluding that Quentin’s problem does not end with his leaving home for Harvard University in the North, because he does not feel that he belonged at Harvard. The failure to integrate himself in a new, changing community away from home is instrumental in determining his death. Thus he dies belonging neither to the corrupt, aristocratic Southern community, nor to the new, materialistic North (177).

To attribute Quentin’s death to a cultural or historical determinant lends the reader a cultural-specific reason often too overwhelmingly powerful to resist. As Quentin’s last day is bound up with memories of the past, it is very tempting to regard Quentin, like Donald M. Kartiganer did, as “sacrifice to repetition of past” (394). But this opinion in general does not account for the fact that not all people trapped in the past, or devoted to the code of honor, will willfully seek self-destruction. Rosa Coldfield, the first narrator in *Absalom, Absalom!* is in many respects Quentin’s double, but she survives, though in a miserable condition. Ike McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses* survives as well, in spite of his own anguish over the
corruption in the McCaslin family, his failed marriage, and a solitary life. Even Faulkner himself provided counter argument. In speaking to an English class at the University of Virginia, he said:

Well, there are some people in any time and age that cannot face and cope with the problems. There seem to be three stages: The first says, This is rotten, I'll have no part of it, I will take death first. The second says, This is rotten, I don't like it, I can't do anything about it, but at least I will not participate in it myself, I will go off into a cave or climb a pillar to sit on. The third says, this stinks and I'm going to do something about it. (Faulkner in the University 245-246)

Here Faulkner outlined the circumstances very briefly, and raised important observations over the questions of life, action and death. First of all, “any time and age” may produce people who are like Quentin, Rosa, or Ike, and these people hold different attitudes towards the same reality. Moreover, Faulkner raised the attitude of a culturally-bound man above his culture, making it part of the overall human condition. So Quentin's life and death would probably be better understood in terms of more universal concerns, rather than grounding it ultimately in the Southern context.

Brooks, with his perceptive mind, was probably aware of the disparity between a correlation of a culture's decline and a man's suicide. He warned against the tendency to read “The Sound and the Fury...as another Faulknerian document describing the fall of the Old South” (Yoknapatawpha 334). Instead, he supplied an alternative explanation that Quentin’s death “is not really occasioned by the breakup of the Old
South so much as by the breakup of an American family wrecked by parental strife and lack of love” (*First Encounters* 59). It seems that Brooks was more open than many critics to the ambiguities inherent in Faulkner’s novel and was ready to move from an abstract, culturally-consciously answer to a more tangible, personal dimension, which is a very interesting example of how criticism could evolve and reflect upon itself.

Another interpretation for Quentin’s suicide is supplied by the more philosophical group and often goes hand in hand with the cultural criticism. Human destiny as encompassed by time, the disappearance of the Old South and the lost ways of life, are often mingled together and become a hybrid of universal scars. This understanding has been located with reference to Quentin’s fate from the early years of the novel’s critical reception. Michael Millgate contended “what Quentin is really obsessed with is time” (*William Faulkner* 31). Peter Swiggart in *The Art of Faulkner’s Novels* devoted a chapter to the discussion of time, pointing out that both Quentin and his father “look upon the passage of time as the source of inescapable human frustration.” When his failure to change the past is signaled by a failure “to convince his father that he and Caddy have committed incest”, Quentin finds no alternative to his anguish but to commit suicide (94). Swiggart’s idea of Quentin being trapped in the past
found the strongest support with Jean-Paul Sartre, who, in his celebrated essay “On *The Sound and the Fury*: Time in the Work of William Faulkner,” proposed that Faulkner’s heroes “never look ahead,” and that the suicide for Quentin “is not a human possibility...[it] is an immobile wall, a thing which he approaches backward...it is ...a fatality” (91-92). Sartre’s interpretation deprives Quentin of any free will and choice, placing him instead firmly within the clutches of past and considering him a substitute for the “intuition of the future lacking in the author himself” (92).

Sartre’s philosophical observations on Faulkner and time, and its conclusions on representative characters like Quentin, hold its unique appeal for later critics, especially when they are drawn to make philosophical meditations. Many critics, such as Lawrence Thompson, André Bleikasten and Cleanth Brooks, all contributed to the discussion on time and man, thus came to a similar conclusion that Quentin is regretful of the “irreconcilability of virginity and honor” and desirous to halt the passage of time (B. Berger Miller 94). Such an idea, however, is not without problems and opponents. For one thing, Sartre started out with his own philosophical preoccupations, so in passing judgment has substituted Quentin for all major characters and confused the characters’ intentions with the author’s. For another, some of the conclusions drawn
here seem contradictory with one another. Take Brooks and Swiggart for example, while they both acknowledged Quentin to be trapped in time, they differed in the nature of this predicament that drives Quentin to suicide. Brooks held that Quentin life “amounts to having no future” because he cannot environ a time when he could be out of the anxiety (\textit{Yoknapatawpha} 329), while Swiggart believed it is precisely this anguish that Quentin tries to preserve in his death; he is not intending, as Brooks says, to escape from it (\textit{Art of Faulkner’s Novels} 100). John T. Matthews added to the controversy by taking sides with Swiggart, while David Paul Ragan agreed with neither, offering his own interpretation that Quentin dies upon “his discovery that neither the despair nor remorse nor bereavement is particularly important” (18). In other words, Ragan believed that Quentin dies because he finds nothing really matters. Man’s insignificance in face of time is too much for him to bear.

Partly owing to the contradiction within broad cultural and philosophical generalizations to account for a man’s choice of ending his life, a number of scholars moved away from it to interpret Quentin’s action with relation to the problems within his family. Lawrence Bowling was one of the earlier critics who first gave recognition to circumstances in the Compson family. He identified the curse on the family to be Mrs. Compson, labeling her “the primary corrupting force” (476). Years later, while
attributing Quentin’s death to his inability in either fulfilling or forfeiting the cultural norms, Brooks declared the basic cause behind Quentin’s death, as well as the breakup of the Compson family, consists in having a “hypochondriac, whining mother” (Yoknapatawpha 333). Some later critics like Sally Page, Maureen Ann Waters generally followed Bowling’s judgment on Mrs. Compson. However, as literary perspectives change over the years, critics gradually came to attach attention to Mr. Compson’s responsibility in forging his son’s fate. For example, Mark Spilka declared that “it is his father...who dominates his (Quentin’s) imagination, who tests and undercuts his motives, and who finally determines his suicide” (466). André Bleikasten stated “the impasse of the father-son relationship is perhaps the major cause of Quentin’s inability to live” (113). These voices find support even a dozen years later in the criticism of Arthur F. Kinney and Elizabeth M. Kerr whose work too put the responsibility on the Compson parents.3

These attempts to explain Quentin’s life and death in terms of family trouble and parental failure offer more immediate, individualized reasons to approach the novel and characters. As Brooks described, The Sound and the Fury is a book that “clearly records...the downfall of a particular family” (Yoknapatawpha 334). The weak, cynical father and the

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socially-conscious, complaining mother corroborate to epitomize a kind of parental betrayal, which must have exerted a profound effect on the hypersensitive Quentin. Hence, different from the philosophical musings on time and human existence, the emphasis on parent-children relationships as causes for Quentin’s death gains strength from common-sense family values and family studies centering on behavioral patterns. Clearly, the concern with family as an entity has outlasted the metaphysical bent in Quentin criticism, since the latter voice was mostly uttered around 1960s, whereas the research on parent-children relationships in the Compson family has lasted well into the beginning of the twentieth century, when we witness Gary Storhoff outlining the interactive modes of the Compson family to sustain itself in an unproductive way.

Still another group of critics believed the motive behind Quentin’s suicide lies with his relationship with Caddy, the only loving Compson in the family and on whom Quentin seems to have lavished his concept of family honor. Evelyn Scott’s review in 1929 of Faulkner’s novel *The Sound and the Fury* is the earliest insight into this issue. She described Quentin as “oversensitive...pathologically devoted to his sister,” and regarded his determination to commit suicide as “his protest against her disgrace” (117). After Irving Howe made comments similar to Evelyn’s in 1950s, Melvin
Backman in 1966 came along with an all-inclusive discussion on Quentin-Caddy relationship, stating that “it is this (sexual) impotence...combined with his love for Caddy, seems to underlie Quentin’s idealism and desire for death” (23). Backman considered the cultural code of honor possible urges, but he argued that “the ultimate reason for Quentin’s suicide is the loss of Caddy to Dalton,” because “it was not so much the gross materialism of Herbert Head that defeated Quentin as the sexual potency of Dalton Ames” (27). In this respect Backman and his followers drifted further from Swiggart who tended to relate Quentin more with the Southern code. With this circle of critics the “personal rather than a cultural situation” earns primary attention in critical assessment (Backman 27).

The consequence of such a switch in emphasis gave impetus to two books in the year of 1975, *The Most Splendid Failure* by André Bleikasten and *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge* by John T. Irwin. Both books applied Freudian psychoanalytic terms to their studies. Bleikasten considered the brother-sister relationship to be as “fatal” to Quentin as the father-son relationship, and called Quentin’s death “a triumph of the id and the superego” (113, 116). Irwin measured the consciousness of Quentin along two roles: that of brother seducer and brother avenger. He followed Backman’s idea on Quentin’s impotence, saying the hero’s
“obsessive concern with Caddy's loss of virginity is a displaced concern with his own inability to lose his virginity” (38). Irwin related Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury* to his experience in *Absalom, Absalom!* By reading the story of Henry, Bon and Judith as parallels to the story of Quentin and Caddy, Irwin stated that Quentin, while alive, could neither perform the role of brother avenger as he is defeated by Dalton, nor satisfy his sexual potency after his aborted act of joint suicide. By contrast, Quentin in death could fulfill his roles, for death represents “not only the punishment, upon his own person, of the brother seducer by the brother avenger, it is as well the union of the brother seducer with the sister” (43).

With all the scholarship it is now an established fact that Quentin's suicide cannot be separated from his relationship with Caddy. But the psychological studies in this field are prone to be limited in scope or speculative in premises. In general, many psychological studies handled Quentin like a clinical case, labeling him “pathological” or “narcissistic.” Evelyn Scott and Irving Howe suggested about the importance of the brother-sister relationship, but they did not offer adequate explanations for their argument. Bleikasten took advantage of Freudian terms without bothering to establish a relationship between theory and the novel. Backman's is a much more extended study but its dismissal of Herbert Head's influence reduces Quentin’s motivations into a single-dimensional
one, that of the physically sexual drive. As for Irwin, he based his argument “within the context of larger speculations about the psychology motivating several characters in the two novels” (Ragan 16). It is natural, that even with Irwin’s deeply penetrating psychological excavations, the discussion is still not at an end.

Two decades later, Margaret D. Bauer came up with a study focusing on Quentin’s death. She argued that, unlike Herbert Head, Caddy’s first lover Dalton Ames does show some concern and love for Caddy. After reassessing the conscious and subconscious memories in Quentin’s section, Bauer introduced the interpretation that Quentin dies as the result of his inability to live with the guilty knowledge that “for him his sister gave up a chance...of leading a ‘normal’ life” (71). Bauer’s understanding is a stimulating return to the subject of Quentin’s death after quite a number of years’ silence in the critical world. Her effort not only yields an inspiring reading into Quentin’s motives, but also indicates the enduring appeal of this topic, as well as its open-endedness.

1.2 What Quentin’s Death Symbolizes

In describing a man’s actions and choices in a situation, there is first of all “because” to account for, which gives answers to the circumstances surrounding the actions. Then we must supply the answer to “in-order-to,”
that describes the action-doer’s intention through his actions (Jean Baechler 53). But pause and think: is it not enough that critics analyze the circumstances and end the discussions there? As we can see, most studies do not merely end with the factors responsible for Quentin’s action. The reasons for doing so are not simply a literary tradition that compels scholars to consider Quentin in the symbolic light. Rather, it is a universal practice to learn the facts and judge the value of it that critics conform to and follow. Therefore, when the critics are trying to account for Quentin’s death, most of them have more or less described the hero’s purpose in committing suicide. As the understandings of such an act differ from one critic to another, the meanings they attach to it naturally vary a great deal. To simplify the matter, I have classified the critical opinions into five categories and shall look at them one by one.

In Swiggart’s 1962 criticism, the causes for Quentin’s suicide were traced to his attempt to change the past. Swiggart explained that Quentin feels bound up in the inevitability of change and decay, and he tries to defeat time by some kind of action he is capable of. When all his attempts fail, his only resource would be to kill himself, thus freeing his consciousness from the corrupt world. Therefore, death symbolizes for Quentin the escape, into which he could “stabilize the elusive I was of the recent past and so preserve his moral feeling intact” (Art of Faulkner’s
Swiggart also pointed out the fact that Quentin’s defense of death as a means of preserving life “is a product of self-deception, of his inability to accept his own despair” (Art of Faulkner’s Novels 101). But of course, whether Quentin could succeed with this act is another question. It does not interfere with the symbolic value of his attempt.

Swiggart’s idea of escaping the passage of time reverberated in a number of critics’ conclusions about Quentin, of which the more prominent are Brooks and John T. Matthews. Both of them agreed on Quentin’s strong ties to the South, its past and his memory of such. Matthews returned in 1991 to the “lost cause” in The Sound and the Fury and was strongly in favor of interpreting the characters from cultural and philosophical perspectives. Elaborating on the subject of Quentin’s “legacy of loss”, Matthews stated that Quentin, because of his dread to live “a life in which nothing happens that has not already happened,” commits suicide to “make his temporary state of mourning permanent” (Faulkner and the Lost Cause 62), which is virtually a restatement of Swiggart’s opinion two dozen years earlier. Death, therefore, means for Quentin a welcome way out of the loud world in which “nothing but the old repetition of the past happens” (Faulkner and the Lost Cause 61). His attempt to take his own life suggests both his refusal to continue his legacy of loss and his successful halting of time on his own initiative.
On the matter of Quentin’s relationship with time, Brooks shared with Swiggart and Matthews essentially the same belief that Quentin realized that “the past contains moral values that are gone and therefore the passage of time must be halted” (Miller 94). Having no way out, Quentin would like to “do away with time, locking himself into some past from which there would be no development and no progression” (Brooks, *Yoknapatawpha*, 329). So death opens for Quentin the only escape, from which he would cast away his emasculating experience of failing to meet the old heroic code. Naturally, due to the disagreement on the circumstances responsible for Quentin’s death, there are obvious differences in the interpretations of symbolism among Swiggart, Matthews and Brooks. Although all viewed Quentin’s suicide as escape, they differed in interpreting what Quentin seeks through death. Swiggart and Matthews maintained that Quentin wishes to preserve his moral feelings in death, whereas Brooks believed Quentin is simply seeking a shelter where he could be out of the anxiety, that the preservation of his moral feelings would not be his concern.

Lawrence Thompson, however, came to a different conclusion that death for Quentin symbolizes obsessive love for negative values. Thompson is one of the critics who regarded Quentin in a negative light, primarily because of his relationship with Caddy, his frustrated attempts
to stop Caddy’s growth, and his obsession with death. In his essay “Mirror Analogues in The Sound and the Fury,” Quentin is paired up with Benjy, who represents “a kind of moral mirror” (112). In contrast to Benjy’s “instinctive response to objects used to symbolize positive values in human experience,” Quentin’s act of suicide “serves to dramatize a consciously willed and obsessive love for negative values which are life-injuring, life-destroying” (114). With his observation Thompson reversed the judgment of Swiggart, Brooks, and Matthews. While the latter three have generally considered Quentin a young man troubled by moral truth and regarded his death in such light, Thompson considered Quentin a disruptive presence and interpreted his death as the last stubborn attempt to preserve his obsession.

Certainly, criticisms of Quentin’s suicide suggest ideas other than escape and obsession. In this respect I have discovered mainly three interpretations. One is of punishment, another is of rebirth or redemption, and the last is of initiation. The punishment issue is a constant feature in works taking advantage of psychological theories to examine the relationships among Quentin and his family. For example, Carvel Collins borrowed the Freudian theory and explained that Quentin is seeking punishment first from his father on his failures to salvage the family name. When his father would not exercise the authority, Quentin destroys
himself in an attempt to “carry out punishment on himself” (125). This idea of punishment was most elaborately expanded in Irwin’s criticism. Irwin discussed the possible parings of Quentin’s roles with Henry’s in *Absalom, Absalom!*, identified the doubling of two conflicting identities in one character, and came to interpret Quentin’s death in terms of “punishment, upon his own person, of the brother seducer by the brother avenger” (43).

Another alternative to reading Quentin’s choice is closely linked with the punishment issue, that of redemption. Critics in general have noticed Quentin’s suicide by means of drowning himself in water. As the water imagery is a romantic concept endowed with the symbolic power of cleansing and revival, critics like Swiggart, Fowler, Spilka, Irwin and Miller employed its literary symbolism to account for the significance of Quentin’s choice. Swiggart, in arguing for Quentin’s purposeful action to escape the temporal fatality, drew the conclusion that death by water not only symbolizes Quentin’s idea of sexual union, but also demonstrates a last chance to redeem the “inescapable human frustration” by preserving his moral purity. In death “the reader is projected into a physical universe where suicide does mean a victory of consciousness over the passage of time” (*Art of Faulkner’s Novels* 96-100).

Fowler, Spilka, Irwin and Miller approached the subject of symbolic
rebirth more from the relationship of Caddy and Quentin. Both Irwin and Fowler employed Freudian concepts to explain Quentin’s identification with his mirror image in the water. Water, mirror image and the image of Caddy’s muddied drawers evoke Quentin’s memory of his sister lying on her back in the stream and their incestuous talks by the river. Apparently, Quentin could not fulfill his longings in reality. With the act of drowning himself, Irwin asserted, Quentin is able to achieve “the union of the brother seducer with the sister” (43). Fowler agreed with Irwin on the redemption of Quentin’s frustrated desire, explaining that Quentin “successfully enacts both his desire to commit incest with Caddy and his desire to commit joint suicide with Caddy” (13). Drowning himself, Quentin tries to prove that he is capable of significant actions, with the last thrust of his effort.

It is in the light of redemption that Miller called Quentin’s act “regenerating” (96), but unlike the other critics in this group, Miller had a somewhat different reason for doing so. He judged Quentin’s case from the Jungian model of hero-archetype, and considered Quentin’s suicidal fulfillment a step towards significant action. Obviously any action, be it good or bad, is better in this sense than not taking any action at all. While Quentin’s problem in the novel is largely believed to lie with his inability to do anything, Miller considered the final “suicide by water...
reenactment of that figurative, revitalizing incest, the incest he could not consciously effect with Caddy” (96).

Miller’s view introduces to us one more critical reading into the suicide symbolism: the initiation intention of the suicide-taker. In this perspective Quentin’s death is viewed as a “purposeful action” to attribute meaning to his existence (Miller 95). As Miller viewed Quentin from the angle of hero-archetypes, he naturally passed the judgment that Quentin, while living, falls short of “committing any significant action” (95). Perhaps readers remember well the nihilistic advice about human circumstances Mr. Compson gives to his son: “We must just stay awake and see evil done for a little” (SF 112). On such remarks Warren commented that because Quentin could not accept his father’s values of annihilation on human effort, he desires to establish his by the “only one act to which he can attribute moral significance” (252). In the 1982 published essay, Donald M. Kartiganer divided the Yoknapatawpha families broadly into three generations, and classified the first generation as an “originating force.” He described that Quentin, as a third generation representative, “returns to the founding generation” (394). This may not sound a very original effort in itself. Nevertheless, it is significant for Quentin that he does take an initiative to reverse his father’s passivity (394). The death by water, thereby, “has all the positive overtones of
rebirth” by which Quentin could move “towards a process of individuation” (Warren 95).

The problem with Miller’s argument, and perhaps with some who reasoned in the same manner, is that they confused Quentin’s actions with the consequences. Miller believed Quentin is incapable of doing anything, but in reality he is able to take actions, like challenging Dalton, trying to keep Caddy at home, and refusing Herbert’s offer of friendship. Miller made the mistake of substituting the result of an action for the action itself. Quentin’s tragedy is that even though he strives, his action falls short of the “great expectations”. He fails in bringing real changes to satisfy his needs or soothe his anguish. Brooks is undoubtedly right when he said Quentin can neither fulfill nor forfeit the code of honor. I would assert that Quentin is constrained by his upbringing, the conventional codes of his white community and his ineffective relationships with men around him, so he is unable to rise above his circumstances.

So far, we have seen that a long list of critics has touched upon the topic of Quentin’s death. And the list could go on much longer, because I do not propose my review exhaustive in terms of critical opinions. Yet, as I have noted earlier, the major works assessing Quentin’s suicide have been done in mid-twentieth century, and that there are a number of important critics leading the show, like Warren, Brooks, Backman and Spilka. The
philosophical, cultural, psychological dimensions as well as the angle of family studies have been adopted by various critics. Miller, Collins, Irwin, Kartiganer and others all tried to further the argument with their originality here and there. The result is, over the years, there has accumulated a wealth of critical insights to address Quentin’s life and death.

Although I have strived to classify and review the many critical comments over the years, the effort may have reduced the interdependence and complexity of critical opinions. Since generally I have worked as if the critics have presented somehow isolated ideas, each standing alone and not linking to others. In fact, a great many of the opinions are linked to the point of overlapping, like the cultural and philosophical dimensions, the familial and the psychological. At the same time, due to the sheer size of the existing criticism, a reader or a scholar, apart from feeling awesome respect for all the creative output, may still feel some bewilderment at the diverse yet sometimes contradictory interpretations. Thus the question of Quentin’s tragedy runs on, not yet resolved. I will begin my discussion by introducing the sociological theory on suicide as a way to approach Quentin’s problem and organize the chapters to follow.
2. Sociological Findings on Suicide

The sociological theory has contributed remarkably concrete and well-defined studies towards the understanding of suicide. Due to the nature of this discipline, it may present a more systematic study of the question of suicide by defining the problem, identifying the premises, and establishing hypotheses. It is from this discipline of social science that the present paper gains a theoretical framework for laying down the fundamental questions regarding Quentin’s death, in an attempt to objectively define and examine the development of his character and suicidal mentality. Thus it is necessary to give an overview of the sociological theories as they relate to the present scope and focus of the paper. In this effort I find it most conducive to refer not only to a few classic texts on suicide by such eminent authors as Emile Durkheim, Jack D. Douglas, Jerry Jacobs, Jean Baechler, Erwin Stengel and Nancy G. Cook, but also the concise and illuminating review of important sociological works offered in Douglas’ most comprehensive study The Social Meanings of Suicide as well as Steve Taylor’s two books: The Sociology of Suicide, Durkheim and the Study of Suicide.

2.1 The Sociological Approaches to Suicide: An Overview

In examining the approaches to suicide in sociology, Steve Taylor
classified two basic kinds: that of the traditional and the interpretative.4

The more traditional school is headed by Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist whose landmark book *Suicide* remains one of the most important works in sociology. Durkheim observed that “the tendency to suicide” is actually shaped by “the social causes” (145). Hence from his point of view the study of suicide should concentrate on “exploring the relationship between the collective organization of social life and the individual, or personal, experience of suicide” (Taylor, *Sociology of Suicide* 19). In conclusion, Durkheim said that “suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of the social groups of which the individual forms a part” (210).

Durkheim’s theory of social integration has found wide application and become one of the fundamental theories on suicide. Many studies after Durkheim test and prove his hypotheses by examining how ways of life would socially isolate individuals and consequently lead to higher suicide rates in general and expose individuals to greater risks of suicidal behaviors in particular.5 For example, some sociological researches have proved that suicide could take root in an individual’s inability to adjust to the change in social status (qtd. in Douglas 138). It would not be a surprise

4 Steve Taylor, *The Sociology of Suicide*, pp. 8, 39. For this research of mine Taylor’s simplified manner will do quite adequately. Douglas preferred to examine by author the major sociological reports, see Douglas, *The Social Meanings of Suicide*.

5 This conclusion is quoted from Taylor’s *Durkheim and the Study of Suicide*, pp. 25-32; and Douglas’s *The Social Meanings of Suicide*, pp. 84-91, 95-151.
to find that some of the literary interpretations on Quentin’s death have confirmed Durkheim’s conclusion, such as the relation of Quentin’s death to the decline of his family status, and the understanding of Quentin’s oversensitive nature that prevents him from finding meanings in his communities. These conclusions on Quentin give proof to the universality of sociological findings on suicide.

In follow-up researches, some sociologists have offered other interpretations in order to account for the correlation between people of higher social status and the suicidal tendency. Martin Gold argued that the choice of suicide or homicide is determined by a framework of several social factors, an index to which is found in the type of punishment: instead of physical abuses, the children of middle-class are more prone to receive psychological punishment which places the blame inside them. The children then lose the ready target for external aggression and often select themselves as inward self-damaging target (654).

In 1950s, there arose an alternative theory in the sociology of suicide which tries to offer “a more interpretative, or subjectivist, approach to the study of social life” (Taylor, Sociology of Suicide 39). One important development so far within the interpretative approach is to study “the possible causal relationships between childhood experiences and suicidal behavior” (Taylor, Sociology of Suicide 27), which seems to confirm the
position taken by Gold in his earlier work. This concern with childhood or child-rearing practices has generated large volumes of research in two major areas of interest: one on the reconstruction of “the childhood experiences for particular suicidal individuals,” the other on “testing factors such as family disorganizations, sibling position, child-rearing techniques, and ... parental deprivation” in relation to the suicidal population (Taylor, *Sociology of Suicide* 128).

Some other interpretative sociologists venture even further in the direction of looking into the varied experiences of the suicide takers. Sociologists Jack Jacobs, Douglas and Jean Baechler started out with the premises that the initial aim of suicide research should be “to identify, or empathize, with the subject’s experiences rather than to explain his behavior” (Taylor, *Sociology of Suicide* 41). Jacobs went as far as to place a supreme emphasis on suicide notes left behind by people killing themselves so as to decode common messages about the suicide taker’s mind regarding his situation (qtd. in Douglas 60-72). Douglas agreed with Jacobs on the first priority of examining the suicidal acts, but his purpose was to look for social meanings of suicide like revenge, escape, repentance behind the suicide taker’ experience (60-72). Baechler, developing Douglas’ approach further, argued for suicidal act as a response to an existential problem (11).
2.2 The Implications of Sociological Findings

The relevance of sociological theories on suicide to the present scope of this paper is evident: my focus is to explore circumstances so as to account for an individual’s suicide, which has received a systematic and evolving treatment in sociology. There is no reason why my proposed research will not benefit by borrowing and taking advantage of theoretical premises, concepts and methodological applications introduced in the existing works of sociology. In order to clarify the extent to which my research is indebted to the sociological findings, I hereby summarize the benefits that a reading of sociological works has generated for my work.

The sociological studies on suicide have so far anchored an individual firmly within his social context. Durkheim emphasized the importance of “illustrating and explaining the relationship between social, or collective, life and individual behavior” (Taylor, Sociology of Suicide 9). The focus on individual’s relationship to the society could be applied to the reading of Quentin’s fate, so as to understand the impact of various relationships on his decision. Defined in Durkheim’s terms, Quentin is an individual born into a certain social context; his tragic fate only comes to light in the social context he is bound up in and complied to negotiate with. Therefore, according to Durkheim, any analysis of a purely psychological nature
would be insufficient to answer the question why Quentin decides to take his own life.

Literary criticism must look beyond the scientific data to account for the invisible forces in man. Therefore, the direction of Durkheim’s research is of no small importance to the readings of Quentin Compson as a character for whom the chances of a tolerable way of life are tragically reduced. As the search for observable, established facts of human experience is never the end of a literary study—otherwise literature and literary criticisms would have been long replaced by some other social disciplines like sociology, or archeology with solid data, well-regulated experiments and measurable tools—the study in literature will always aim at some “invisible forces”, some fundamental truths about the human condition of which every man is part of and can thus claim his humanity as a man (Gibbens 53). Durkheim’s psycho-social dimension encourages scholars to place the relationship between man and his society on the level of meaning and purpose. With Quentin’s suicide, it would not be an exception.

If from Durkheim’s study I have adopted the fundamental hypotheses on which to build my research, what would be the use of the followers of Durkheim? Actually, studies of sociologists from the 1950s onward provide the necessary methodological models to identify and break down the
specific social factors in relation to a better-defined discussion on circumstances surrounding personality growth and suicidal behaviors.

Firstly, the arrangement of chapters is modeled on the sociological findings about the kinds of social factors that shape an individual's behaviors. I have tried to handle the discussion of Quentin from broader social contexts to narrower ones, the dividing line here being the family. On the broader level, social constraints like the white community and the race issue play a role in Quentin's identification with his society. Therefore, the first two chapters are devoted to the exploration of each social factor. Chapter One looks at Quentin's inability to attach himself to the white community through an exploration of the frustrations and failure of his communication with Rosa Coldfield. Rosa is the only white neighbor in the Southern community to have approached Quentin and presents a case in which we could explore how Quentin's interaction with Rosa compounds his problem of integration into his community, which in turn adds to his suicidal tendency. Chapter Two will take race as the other cultural variant. By reading Quentin's relationship with the blacks, and with Dilsey in particular, it argues that Quentin's acceptance of a racially biased Southern code leads to his withdrawal from the larger social scene.

Chapters Three and Four move from broader social variables into the immediate family circle that seems to exhibit a greater impact on
Quentin’s state of mind. The introduction of family theory and relevant criticism on the Compson family will be presented first in Chapter Three, followed by the discussion on Quentin’s parents. The conclusion is that each of the Compson parent fails, in Quentin’s memory, to guide their son in a changing world. Chapter Four, like Chapter Three, starts out with a review of the critical opinions regarding the nature of relationship between Quentin and his sister, and then reveals the critical tendency to turn Caddy into an “empty signifier” (Bleikasten, 56), in which Caddy is often viewed as the motivator of the story, the cluster of nature imageries, or the symbol of Southern womanhood. The argument of the present paper, however, maintains that Caddy’s influence over Quentin comes not from abstracting her image and power, but from her status as the one family member that fulfills Quentin’s need to communicate and connect to human beings in a family and world that other ties have become ineffective.

The last chapter, Chapter Five, attempts to support the argument offered in the previous chapters by placing Quentin in the larger literary context of Faulkner’s works. Through a look into a few other characters from some major novels of Faulkner’s later years: Ike McCaslin of *Go Down, Moses*, Chick Malison of *Intruder in the Dust*, and finally, Lucius

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6 A brief summary of the opinions regarding Caddy’s image and character can be found in works of critics such as Bleikasten, 56, and also in several articles in *Caddy Compson*, pp. 39, 22, 16.
Priest of *The Reivers*, Chapter Five maintains the same sociological hypothesis that the answer to an individual’s destiny is to be found in the environment he finds himself in. Even though Faulkner ceased to create boy heroes like Quentin and Joe Christmas who die a tragic death, he did follow the sociological findings, albeit unconsciously, that a better integration into society will help considerably reduce the risk of suicide.

Now finally comes the turn to acknowledge my debt to the interpretative school of sociologists. Unlike the traditionalists who derive their observations almost exclusively from scientific, statistical survey, the interpretative sociologists locate their studies within a view of individuals as “active creators of their own social reality.” Therefore, “human action is *purposeful*” (Taylor, *Durkheim* 131). If the traditionalist has helped with the composition of my project in terms of furnishing basic concepts and the organizational framework, the interpretative approach firmly supports my argument on Quentin’s search for a purpose in life through the interaction with his immediate southern environment, with people he knows and reflects upon in the community, and with his family members. It would not be difficult to understand why Faulkner resurrected Quentin as the central narrator in *Absalom, Absalom!* after he had arranged this character’s death in *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner’s arrangement seems to suggest that Quentin’s choice of death is not occasioned by any
single force, but is a result of his repeated frustrations under various circumstances. Thus the present paper traces Quentin’s behaviors and activities in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury* as a conscious construct of that search; and argues that his suicide is inevitably a product of his circumstances.

In addition, my research has constructed part of its argument around the theories of one author in particular: Jean Baechler. Baechler’s treatise *Suicide* is a relatively recent, yet a comprehensive treatment of suicide, especially of meaning patterns in interpretative terms. My indebtedness to him is two-fold: first of all, I find in Baechler a definition of suicide not only mirroring the real situation of modern man, but a justification to account both for the external and internal conflicts in the character Quentin. Secondly, Baechler pointed out that an understanding of suicide involves “why”, which gives rise to two answers: because and in-order-to. “because” describes the circumstances of suicide while “in-order-to” tries to assess the meaning of the action (53).

These two sets of questions are what I endeavor to adequately account

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7 But noticeable differences exist between Douglas and Baechler’s patterns: one with classification and one with definition. First, there are both four types of meanings in each author’s book, but in Baechler’s study each type allows several subtypes. So I regard Baechler’s patterns more concrete and specific. Second, Douglas’ definition of patterns is relatively complex while Baechler’s is simpler. See Douglas, *The Social Meanings of Suicide*, p. 284-319, and Baechler, *Suicides*, p. 63

8 Jean Baechler’s definition reads: “Suicide denotes all behavior that seeks and finds the solution to an existential problem by making an attempt on the life of the subject.” His definition implies a number of things, among them: a recognition of suicide as a response to a problem; a definition of that problem as existential, bearing both external and internal conflicts. For an extended discussion on this definition and also on the differences of definitions offered by several prominent sociologists like Durkheim and Halbwachs, see Jean Baechler, *Suicides*, pp. 9-22.
for in the process of my research work. As outlined in the arrangement of the chapters, I attempt to address the “because” question raised by Baechler by focusing respectively on more external factors like cultural and social influences in community and race, then on the more internal ones like Quentin’s relationships with family members. Through the exploration of the social and cultural variables, I propose an answer to “in-order-to”: that Quentin Compson as a man struggles in order to find a purpose, a meaning for life in his social context, the failure of which leads to his suicide, the last act that he initiates as a man.
Chapter I  A Destiny Mapped Out

_Absalom, Absalom!_ fascinates the reader with its multiple narrations. The most intriguing part concerns how each narrator brings into the interpretation of the Sutpen story his or her own understanding of the world in which they live, because as long as a man “is more or less a product of his circumstances, he is influenced by the locality, class and generation he belongs to” (Sugiyama 58).

Seen in this light, the narrators reveal a lot, at least as much about their states of mind as the Sutpen history. Among the narrators, Quentin, Mr. Compson and Shreve have all appeared in _The Sound and the Fury_, so a probing into their mindsets and motivations would be incomplete should we forget to leave an eye open for the circumstances that function as a determining variant in the previous novel. Therefore, there remains only one narrator to the world of _Absalom, Absalom!_, Rosa Coldfield, who dies at the end of the novel and can disclaim any real contact with other novels. Interestingly enough, it is to this Rosa that critics’ attention often turns in recent years.⁹ Rosa’s construction of Sutpen as a demon has been seen as

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⁹ Rosa has not featured as an important female character in earlier studies. From 1990s onward, there seems to be a rise in the study of Rosa as an independent voice and participant in the story of the Sutpen’s as a southern legend. The major studies I have at hand include Patrick O’Donnell’s essay which constructs Rosa’s chaotic language as a means to challenge the order of decorous narrative perceived to mark institutionalized identity, Betina Entzminger’s essay in which she described how Quentin misses Rosa’s message of the Sutpens’ story as a mad one, and Olivia Carr Edenfield’s article stressing Rosa’s desire to find a place in her community. I am indebted a great deal to Edenfield’s observations on Rosa, and have tried to carry her argument further by pointing out what significance lies in Rosa’s viewing of both her life and the Sutpens in that manner.
the projection of her own frustrated hopes, so passionate and vindictive that David Paul Ragan called her “the most biased, perhaps least reliable source,” which echoes Cleanth Brooks’ remark that because Rosa “remains rigid with horror and hate for forty-three years...in an uncomprehending stasis”, she is the only one who is “damned” (Yoknapatawpha 305).

Ragan’s judgment on Rosa misses a crucial point of appreciating the narrative powers in Absalom, Absalom!. All the narrators in the story have their bias. Faulkner’s deliberate choices of narrators contribute to the creation of each one’s own version of “truth” (Levins 35). Therefore, to hold one version in particularly lower esteem fails to realize that “as bias is balanced against bias and distorted views give way to views with different distortions...the fragments begin to fall into place...and at last they cohere in a story possessing an immediacy...” (Waggoner 80).

Even if we acknowledge the possibility of a more biased version, a closer study would reveal that probably Mr. Compson could be more biased than Rosa. Mr. Compson has a deep distrust of women, most likely a cynical fruit of his estranged relationship with his wife Catherine

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10 Actually, Ragan has gone on to assert that “the peculiar view she [Rosa] has of them [characters in Sutpen family] renders much of what she says worthless in unraveling the essential truth (or even the necessary facts to approach that truth) in the Sutpen history” (71). My opinion, however, contrasts Ragan’s because I agree with Entzminger on the point of Rosa as one of the authorities in shaping Sutpen’s legend, and that Rosa’s rambling monologue has a message that Quentin fail to notice. But I differ from Entzminger on the point of what exactly is the message.
Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. Commenting on Rosa, he says that she learns from “her spinster aunt...to see the fact of her own breathing...not only a living and walking reproach to her father, but a breathing indictment, ubiquitous and even transferable, of the entire male principle” (*AA* 59-60), thus as the second narrator effectively rewrites Rosa’s narration and reduces her to the status of a hysteric. Mr. Compson takes a further step describing Ellen and Judith, Rosa’s sister and niece, as escaping from reality: Ellen a “swamp-hatched butterfly” rising into “a perennial bright vacuum of arrested sun”, and Judith “dreaming...in her complete detachment and imperviousness to actuality almost like physical deafness” (*AA* 69-70). He seems to think that women are either vindictive, probing like Rosa and her aunt, or dreamy, self-centered like Ellen and Judith. The only perfect woman in Mr. Compson’s imagination appears to be Bon’s octoroon mistress, with “a face like a tragic magnolia, the eternal female, the eternal Who-suffers” (*AA* 114). This view of Mr. Compson on women, in addition to reflecting on his dreamy and impotent inner world, has revealed his deep-rooted bias of women as mute, docile, ignorant containers of male desires.

The generic level on which Mr. Compson allows his bias a free rein seems to suggest he is more biased and unreliable than Rosa, because it is quite plain that Rosa has not driven her bias at the “whole male
principle.” Her long-harbored hatred of Sutpen has an unmistakable foe and is well justified since he has proposed a plan that no women with self-respect could lightly forgive, let alone Rosa, who adheres to her codes of womanhood and expects a not-too-vulgar return on Sutpen’s part. Moreover, Mr. Compson has not only lessened his hold on his personal opinions, but also let his fancy run wilder in speculating and constructing Bon’s visit with Henry to his octoroon mistress and son, based on very few known facts. When charting out the important conjectures about the Sutpens in his book *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, Cleanth Brooks discovered that all the conjectures are contributed by either Mr. Compson or Shreve. Ilse Dusoir Lind also labeled the observations in Mr. Compson’s narration as having “dubious validity” (891). While some conjectures of his are probably reasonable guesses (like Sutpen telling Henry of Bon having an octoroon woman and son), other are purely imaginary constructs of his fancy (like his vision of Bon as a decadent, feminine man). With his conjectures, Mr. Compson is quite capable of misleading the reader, as can be seen by Quentin and Shreve’s effort to revise the story with their own interpretations. So to hold Rosa as a more unreliable source of information cannot meet the challenges it poses, nor is it, I believe, the intent behind William Faulkner’s use of

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11 Of a total of 39 important conjectures, Mr. Compson has contributed 11 entries, with only one being confirmed by the “Genealogy” attached to the Modern Library edition. See Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, pp. 432-36.
multiple perspectives.

Brooks’ view on Rosa, however, has a ring of truth because Rosa is horrified by Sutpen’s shameless proposal, the impact of which is so great that it sends her home in an outrage and shuts her up for forty-three years. Yet Rosa cannot be said to remain in “an uncomprehending stasis” (Brooks, *Yoknapatawpha* 305). She has tried to accomplish something on her mind, as can be judged by her summoning Quentin and going up twice to Sutpen Hundred. If she is an old maid fossilized at her youth and incapable of growth, she does not have to do anything except for calling Sutpen a demon. This is an issue to which I will turn later in this essay.

Rather than viewing Rosa through the lens of Quentin and Mr. Compson and brushing her aside as a pathetically hysteric old maid, Recent critics like Donnell and Entzminger have tried to assess Rosa as a human being in her own right with reason and intellect, to acknowledge that her narration of the events and the subsequent evaluations contain both moral and cultural undertones for the other characters as well as for the reader.

So I am taking the line of criticism that views Rosa as a much fuller being who learns, grows but is devastated by a non-supportive, indifferent environment, which sees women as objects of protection and ignores Rosa’s effort to fit in with prescribed societal roles (Entzminger 112).
Rosa’s circumstance is never an inspiring one: a puritan father dying from virtual suicide, a spinster aunt who elopes abruptly, a sister married with two children even older than herself, a brother-in-law who is a merciless plantation owner, the devastating war and two horrible killings, then finally, her own engagement never fulfilled, coupled by the loss of her last kin. It is in this circumstance that Rosa is born into and destined to the end of her life, with very little opening for her. Her life could be seen as an attempt to adapt and perform the preconceived roles of daughter, niece, sister and a wife in a southern community (Edenfield 58). Thus in my work, I would argue for Rosa as a marginalized woman, marginalized precisely by the southern codes of upbringing, and her desire to fulfill the expectations as perceived by her to be honor, pity, love and faith.

Steve Taylor, in discussing the social context of suicide, explains that “for the participant...there is both possibility (of change, development, etc.) and certainty (in that ‘outcomes’ and ‘results’ are produced)” (Durkheim and the Study of Suicide 166). Therefore, for any participant to function well in society, he must find the balance between possibility and certainty. An ill-balance of the two factors will cause the participant to lose interest in social life, so Taylor concludes

*suicide is more likely in situations of (almost) complete uncertainty where the individual feels that he knows nothing worth knowing or in situations of (almost) complete certainly where the individual feels that he knows everything worth knowing (Durkheim and the Study of Suicide 167).*
Quentin’s problem, as I will reveal it through the discussion of Rosa’s talk, is his inability to comprehend the messages in Rosa’s tragedy. To apply Taylor’s understanding here, Quentin, by the time of his meeting Rosa, has been too much “in the knowing” so that he feels no knowledge is worth “to be known.” Quentin’s childhood is so full of the names of his countrymen that they become “interchangeable and almost myriad,” something Quentin has grown weary of (AA 12). He has lost his interest in learning and prefers to see his community history as a certainty, which is “going to turn and destroy us all some day” (AA 12).

Should Quentin realize the tragic fate of Rosa as a willing bearer and victim of fossilized female honor, he might have a chance to realize his circumstances as no better than hers, that the values he is obsessed with demand the same drying up of flesh and blood in his life by turning him into a ghost of the past and blocking out of the hopes whatever there remain for a human being. Should Quentin read through the intonation of bondage and ruin in Rosa’s interpretation of Sutpen’s story and her life, he might come to learn that his effort to explore meanings within a rigid, static code system will finally come to no avail, that an obsession with the past can do no good for the future.

We have Quentin at the beginning of *Absalom, Absalom!* listening to Rosa’s retelling of the stories only half-heartedly, because “it was a part of
his twenty years’ heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man Sutpen: a part of the town’s—Jefferson’s—eighty years’ heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed...” (AA 11). Quentin has already known the story: his father has told the story before. In this case Rosa’s tale amounts to a waste of Quentin’s time, a fact that even Rosa seems to recognize and kindly reassures him by saying:

“Because you are going away to attend the college at Harvard....So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it. You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazines. Perhaps you will even remember kindly then the old woman who made you spend a whole afternoon sitting indoors and listening while she talked about people and events you were fortunate enough to escape yourself when you wanted to be out among young friends of your own age” (AA 9-10).

Examined as a part of Rosa’s whole story, these very first words are a very revealing piece of talk not only about her upbringing and attitude, but also about the nature of the interaction between Quentin and her in Absalom, Absalom!. There are several messages in this piece of talk which deserve our attention. The first message is Rosa’s keeping secret of her true intentions when explaining her unusual summons for Quentin, a young man who has not “exchanged a hundred words” with her up till this moment (AA 10). It adds incredulity to her words when one realizes that Rosa has summoned Quentin with a note of formal request, which cannot
be so easily put aside by a casual remark of someday Quentin writing a story about it. This polite but incredulous withholding of her true motive has certainly alerted Quentin, so he gives a lukewarm answer “Yessum”, but proceeds to think “only she don’t mean that….It’s because she wants it told” (AA 10).

From the very beginning of the novel, Rosa’s narration encounters a problem: her words are subverted by Quentin’s refusal to accept her stands. This rejection has been foreshadowed even earlier through Quentin’s gaze at Rosa as a crucified child, through his senses of her “talking in that grim haggard amazed voice until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound” (AA 7). After criticizing Rosa’s appearance in a diminutive term and regarding her voice as a source of agitation that forbids listening, now Quentin’s distrust of her language completes his subversion of Rosa as an intelligent, trustworthy narrator. In cynical boredom, he turns to his father Mr. Compson for an explanation of Rosa’s motive, and eventually pins down Rosa as a ghost that needs the protection of a young man to go on a journey. The point here, however, is the frustration of Rosa’s attempt to communicate and reach out to someone in her community. Maybe Quentin is right in thinking “she wants it told”, but his initial success and scorn makes him ignore other messages in her words because he feels the pretense hurts him after he has dutifully
obeyed her order, come all the way “through the dry dusty heat of early September” to a woman “three times his age” with whom he has spoken very little in the past (AA 10).

This first message contributes to a breakdown of communication signaling a failure of Rosa’s next-to-last attempt to find and pass any knowledge in her life, a failure from which more would follow. For the present, Rosa has already been marginalized by Quentin and his father, the former listens with a conviction of already knowing all, and the latter denies her any substance with a label of “ghost”. Through the looking glass of men in her community, her authoritative voice is negated before she even opens her mouth.

But the pretense Rosa gives for her true purpose is not a deliberate fault, because she has been drilled in a tradition to do as a lady does. In the southern codes, it is important for women to hold back “all passions and strong feelings” (Entzminger 112), and to exercise ladylike calm and silence. Alice Ready, a southern girl writing to her friend at the outbreak of the Civil War confessed that she felt so keenly of “dependence,” saying “I cannot do or say anything—for it would be unbecoming in a young lady” (Faust 20). Brought up with its conduct standards, Rosa learns to repress her feelings and remain silent and mute even in childhood. To her aunt’s anger at the town she lends a patient ear, to her father’s stubborn
isolation she has been more maid than daughter, to her sister Ellen's joys of family news she is a willing receiver, to the plight of her niece and nephew Judith and Henry she offers genuine help, and to Sutpen's return she welcomes with hopes of helping him to make a home. Sadly, the Southern code of submissive silence has not helped her to fit in. It is to this end that Rosa “wants the story told”, but this is something she cannot impart explicitly to Quentin. To publicly air the frustrations and indignation at her family, her community would surely be too daring a challenge to undertake. For a southern lady who has grown up with its manners, Rosa is accustomed to the repression of her wants and needs, and has remained so to the end of her life. This time she takes up a “proper excuse” to fulfill her purpose but, one that fails to convince Quentin and leads the latter to regard her as an old maid whom he has an obligation to obey but not the sympathy to identify with.

The next message embedded in Rosa's words is her awareness of the decorum prescribed for a southern lady. When Rosa tells Quentin “perhaps you will even remember kindly then the old woman who made you spend a whole afternoon sitting indoors and listening ...when you wanted to be out among young friends of your own age” (AA 10), she is offering a polite apology for causing a man inconvenience. In *Within the Plantation Household* Elizabeth Fox-Genoves noted: “For a southern woman, “to be T'
meant to be a woman as their society defined women. Specifically, it meant to be a lady” (242). Lady, “a term central to these (southern white) women’s self-conception, denoted...privilege at the same time it specified gender” (Faust 7). Gender-specific qualities in such context imply for women modesty, subordination to men from whom they are granted “the privileges of protection” (Faust 137). In Rosa’s case, we may notice her need for protection as Quentin discover three hours later that she has meant for him to accompany her to Sutpen Hundred, which is, at least one important reason he is sent for, if not all of it. The want of a male companion at Rosa’s house is evident and Mr. Compson and Quentin have both acknowledged the necessity to comply with her wish. In return for this gentlemanly kindness and protection, Rosa has demonstrated her ladylike gratitude. She mentions the gap in age and accordingly the discrepancy in interests. She is the “old woman” and Quentin’s proper circle is “young friends”; her domain is “indoors” confined to talking and listening, and Quentin has the world “out” to experience. Rosa’s use of contrasts indicates that she understands their differences and is ready to take them into account.

Rosa’s polite apology should not be taken lightly, since her narration is the only one in Absalom, Absalom! imbued with a consciousness of others’ opinions, on which ensues her acute pain of alienation. If we
compare Quentin’s and Mr. Compson’s words against hers, we will discover that Quentin’s words begin with a series of annoyed and cynical inquires:

“But why tell me about it?...What is it to me that the land of the earth or whatever it was got tired of him and turned and destroyed him? What if it did destroy her family too? It’s going to turn and destroy us all someday, whether our name happens to be Sutpen or Coldfield or not” (AA 12).

Despite his cynicism, Quentin does care about “whys”. Later we witness Quentin’s attitude change from detached boredom to one of earnest searches towards the reconstruction of the meanings in the past. By contrast, Mr. Compson’s initial words are saturated with fatalistic doom, “Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts” (AA 12). so we would not be surprised to find his talk concerns more with man’s follies and tragic fate.

A sensitive woman, Rosa often views her life through others’ biased eyes. She puts her life under the public scrutiny and displays a tendency to consider others’ judgment in her explication. It is perhaps not coincidental that her first words should be an example of this consciousness. When explaining her situations and the decision to marry Sutpen, Rosa elicits others’ opinions by repeating “No. I hold no brief for myself. I don’t plead youth...I don’t plead propinquity...I don’t plead material necessity... most of all, I don’t plead myself” (AA 18-19). The
“No-plead” rhetoric confines her in the public censure. It shows Rosa has fully comprehended the extent of scandalous infamy to which her decision is vulnerable. In laying out the unpleasant criticism she shows her involvement with a larger theme: the linking of Sutpen to “future hopes and past pride” after he has fought for “four honorable years for the soil and traditions of the land” (AA 19-20). Rosa’s explication points to a similarity with Quentin in that they are both concerned with the preservation of southern values, like honor and bravery for man, sacrifice for and subornation to man whom women could count on for protection.

The last part of her monologue testifies further to her vision of the contrasts between ideals and reality. Referring to the breakdown of her engagement with Sutpen, she cites three times a slightly varying mocking rhyme “Rosie Coldfield, lose him, weep him; caught a man but couldn’t keep him” (AA 168,170,171). Once more illustrating the accusations and criticisms, Rosa reveals a profound knowledge of her marginality in addition to establishing another perspective for her evaluation. In this sense, Rosa can certainly be ranked with Quentin in the obsession of what others regard them. Quentin also confronts the problem of his failure to handle the southern honor. On the one hand, he cares about the South so he asks questions, listens to Rosa and Mr. Compson. On the other hand, he is constantly subject to others’ words and influences. The most significant
example of this is Quentin’s remembrance of his father’s words with the watch as a gift at the beginning of his monologue section in *The Sound and the Fury* “I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire…I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it” (*SF* 48). Viewing Quentin’s suicide as an attempt to become “the arbiter of his own virtues”, Mark Spilka contended that “it is his father, not Caddy, who dominates his imagination, who tests and undercuts his motives, and who finally determines his suicide” (465).

While I do not endorse such a strong assertion as the determining factor of Quentin’s suicide, I believe it may not be far off the point to say that Quentin’s obsession with meanings in human existence harbors an intense awareness of his father’s nihilistic approach. Other memories of what people say and talk about him keep emerging in Quentin’s consciousness: how he makes a spectacle of himself charged with stealing the Italian girl; how later Mrs. Bland and Shreve respond to the charge; how Dalton lies about hitting him when seeing him faint. Like Rosa, Quentin feels the sharp disparity between his helplessness in others’ eyes and his desire to seek for lost certainties in the past. He alone knows that Caddy’s loss of virginity is somehow connected with his inability to defend her (Spilka 454). He is often torn by this realization and seems as
ineffectual as Rosa. This sensitivity marks them out as two paralyzed souls still clinging to the old codes—the honorable man and the modest woman, not knowing their very stubbornness has denied them the access to a bearable life.

The third message in Rosa’s explanation of having Quentin come to her is her very envy and hope for young men like Quentin and her desire to impart her knowledge of the Sutpen story. She refers to Quentin as one “fortunate enough to escape” the events. Among the major narrators, Rosa is the only one to have first-hand experience with people and events in the Sutpen saga. Although her contacts with the Sutpens are limited by her age and their somewhat strained relationship, she is still the participant-narrator. By contrast, Mr. Compson and Shreve have never had any real contact with the Sutpens. Whatever information they gather is passed down through General Compson, Rosa, and even Quentin. Unlike Mr. Compson, who has a habit of letting his imagination of the Sutpens run wild as a means of self-fulfillment, Rosa recognizes the horrifying wastage of human life at the core of Sutpen’s history and comes to call it “cursed” for want of a better term. She is the first narrator to condemn Sutpen as “no gentleman”; a man who has created two children only “to destroy one another and his own line.” She declares Sutpen has “valor and strength but without pity or honor.” (AA 18-20) To a great
extent, what she believes holds ground. Watching Sutpen getting himself ready to offer a proposal to Mr. Coldfield, General Compson echoes Rosa’s view with the remark “Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything” (AA 46). Sutpen himself testifies to Rosa’s belief in confessing later to General Compson that he “had a design.” To accomplish the design he should “require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family—incidentally of course, a wife” (AA 263). Although General Compson seems to be moved by Sutpen’s single-mindedness and calls it “innocence”, this innocence clearly constitutes in neglecting human happiness and lives because they must serve an abstract, inhuman dream.

Even though Rosa sees through Sutpen’s nature of a man devoid of “pity or honor”, her urge as a Southern lady to fill in with some roles after she loses her nearest kinsmen is so irresistible that she renders herself up as a tool at the hands of a “villain”. Hence unfortunately falls prey to Sutpen’s manipulations. By accepting Sutpen’s proposal, Rosa knowingly places herself at his service, aware of herself not as a being“...just my existence...whatever it was that Rosa Coldfield or any young female no blood kin to him represented in whatever it was he wanted” (AA 166). Her willing submission is dashed out by Sutpen’s blunt request that they mate and marry if they have a son. It is not until this moment that Rosa
realizes what Sutpen wants is not even any woman; it is a breeder,\textsuperscript{12} like "a bitch dog or a cow or mare" (AA 168).

A deep blow and insult to Rosa, the world that makes sense and meaning to her seems all of a sudden to vanish before her eyes. She has endured the past insurmountable trials with submission and fortitude, each time clinging to an opening in accordance with her southern upbringing—she professes her admiration for the traditional manly "valor and strength" by silently writing poetry for the Confederate soldiers; she learns to "fulfill the endless tedious obligations" as demanded of a woman in nursing the defeated soldiers who come back "with the ultimate degradation" (AA 157)—but Sutpen’s last breach of a fundamental propriety has annihilated her sustained illusion for this southern man. She packs up and goes back home, realizing the "death of hope and love ...of pride and principle" (AA 170).

Remaining as an old maid for the next forty-three years, she is once more, and probably further pushed to the edge of her southern community. A fact Rosa herself is fully aware and repeatedly speaks of in the second part of her story. But the forty-three years in which she spends musing and brooding alone is not the end of her life and duties. She still does the summoning of Quentin when the occasion rises, vaguely cherishing in the

\textsuperscript{12} Although critical opinions are divided over what sends Rosa home, I have found Olivia Carr Edenfield’s argument on this point most persuasive. See Edenfield 67.
young man’s prospect of a future unmarred by the devastations of Sutpen’s history. Rosa’s hope, though faint and flickering, is in the young generation’s chances for a somewhat unburdened life, because young men like Quentin can go away to “attend the college at Harvard” (AA 9). The spatial relocation offers chances to cast back an obsessive history of the South, something referred to as “almost synonymous with an adoption of a ‘new life’ and a farewell to the South” (Sugiyama 61).

Conscious of this possibility, Rosa shows her good wishes at Quentin’s fortune to “escape.” She gives her summary of the Sutpen events, with a hope of imparting to Quentin the knowledge that the story of Sutpen is not only one of “madness”, but one of “death of everything save the old outraged and aghast unbelieving” (AA 168). The knowledge is a penetrating truth she discovers about the story of the South exemplified in Sutpen and Wash Jones. We learn that Sutpen comes to General Compson, because he foresees the devastation of his plan, the very thing he has had risked his life for and staked everything else upon. We learn also that Wash Jones suddenly realizes the man he has idolized all along leaves nothing for him to look up to. In both cases Sutpen and Jones finds their lives hollowed out with “the death of everything” (AA 168). Both of them reject this discovery, taking upon themselves to set the record right, leading not only to their own deaths, but that of Bon and the virtual doom
of Henry, thus ending the “the old and aghast unbelief” (AA 168).

Like the previous one, Rosa’s third message fails to impress Quentin, partly because Quentin does not consider himself fortunate enough to escape. He has grown up with Sutpen’s story when the story itself has become part of Jefferson’s tradition, “his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts” (AA 12). Quentin’s loss of his own subjectivity to an irrevocable past is clearly indicated from the beginning, if not a fact immediately established. His obsession with the family name and preservation of a gentlemanly honor partly precluded the possibility of identifying the tremendous burden in being involved in “the events.” Even if he achieves an understanding later in the story, he is not willing to face it. Therefore, Quentin’s failure to realize an alternative future as indicted by Rosa anchors him permanently in an environment that dooms both him and Rosa. In this manner, Quentin might be seen a parallel to Rosa: both of them have tried to fit into a community that repeatedly denies their entrances, that shatters the codes of honor they have sincerely upheld and wished to act upon. The marginalization of Rosa’s life would be a harbinger of what is to become of Quentin’s in The Sound and the Fury. In missing once more Rosa’s hope and knowledge for a young man, Quentin
slides further into his destined life with its rigid hold on his mental state.

The last message coming through Rosa’s initial talk is her wish to be remembered as they once sit in a “happy marriage” of listening and speaking, that she can connect to some human being. This, not surprisingly, is again lost on Quentin’s mind. Bored with Rosa’s old tale and suspicious of an old woman’s authority, Quentin listens with gentlemanly respect but a wondering mind. He does not perceive, however, that beneath her outpourings of anger, bewilderment, and indignation there lurks a deep tragic fate for women in the South. It comes out in her adoption of negation on herself by repeatedly saying “I hold no brief for myself,” for Rosa’s life is one constantly being ignored, looked down upon and is thus a piece of entertaining gossip to the town.

With those family members Rosa does make a connection, it is meager and precarious, bordering on the edge of non-existence. On the few occasions of family unions, her chances of becoming close to her father and aunt are reduced by being sent away to play with her niece and nephew. Whatever knowledge she learns often has to come from listening behind closed doors and her own observations. Her father seems to neglect his duty as a male protector and ignores how his daughter manages to survive and to provide for him in a war in which food becomes “harder and harder to come by” (AA 83). Ellen is too engrossed in her family to share the little

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13 The phrase appears nine times in Rosa’s monologue.
sister Rosa’s emotions, evidenced by her spreading Rosa’s words on two occasions: the first of Rosa’s offer to “teach Judith how to keep house and plan meals and count laundry” (AA 71); the second of Rosa remarking “we deserve him” on hearing Ellen’s gossip of Bon’s engagement to Judith (AA 76). Ellen may not be aware that she has turned into a childish joke Rosa’s genuine wish to offer help as a sister and aunt. Judith’s help to Rosa lies only in allowing her to stay and work in the house. Rosa’s modesty, silence and submission have not helped others to recognize her spiritual and emotional needs. When the occasion does arise to actualize her emotional urge with the role of wife and mother, it proves a worse joke than being labeled as an old, eccentric spinster. As her narration discloses, all her attempts at making a constructive human relationship within the propriety of a southern womanhood are frustrated. She is born and grows up in negligence regardless of what she does to break it.

In much the same way, Quentin has suffered like Rosa in conforming to an honor he is obsessed with. As the oldest son, “he is expected to become the head of the family who will continue the Compson line and preserve the tradition which is central to the Southern experience” (Brown 544). Unfortunately, he grows up on the edge of a disintegrating family: an unloving mother who ignores him, a drunken father who imbues him with cynical fatalism, two brothers, one retarded and the other calculating.
Caddy, the only sister capable of loving him, first betrays his pride for the family name with her promiscuity, and then marries a despicable man despite of Quentin’s protest, thus severing the emotional attachment between them. Quentin’s preoccupation with Caddy’s love drives him to contemplate various ways to approach the family dishonor and keep Caddy within his range. He attempts to kill them both but shrinks back at the very moment. He challenges Dalton who makes Caddy pregnant but cowardly faints in front of his opponent. Quentin suffers acute pain when facing his inability to carry out his fancies, subconsciously aware that he could never return to the idyllic time of childhood even if he came through with these plans.

Quentin’s sense of being cast out, of not connecting to any member in the family is a major social-psychological factor that alienates and drives him to despair. In his circle of family and friends, Quentin is ignored and marginalized in that he, despite his clumsy mistakes and weaknesses, strives to live up to the ideals that none around him sincerely care for. As a lonely soul of the same southern ideals, Rosa can certainly claim an alliance with Quentin and ask him to remember “an old woman” (AA 9). Quentin, however, does not recognize this alliance even after listening to her story, and has continued to do so by correcting Shreve addressing her as “Aunt Rosa.” The proper title Quentin insists on is in a sense symbolic.
of the fact that he has restored her to the status of just any neighbor, rejecting the spiritual heritage and emotional stagnation that bonds them. The loss of this message, even Rosa might not be consciously aware of, is so far the most pitiful aspect of their communication, because in not recognizing this spiritual “aunt”, Quentin has lost a chance to understand the parallels between them and learn a lesson through Rosa’s futile struggles, hence got further estranged.

Rosa’s narration witnesses her stubbornness to hold onto the prescribed southern code for a woman and a life-time effort to adapt in order to fit in the society, but the changing circumstances have rendered all her wishes in vain. Even at the last stage of her life, she refuses to give up. She grasps the last chance and makes two attempts to try again. Her summon to Quentin reveals that she desires her knowledge to be imparted to a fellow being she can connect with despite their seeming differences.  

Then she makes two twelve-mile trips to Sutpen Hundred in a span of three months, first to discover what is in that house, then to help the dying Henry, “thereby creating for herself the last chance at playing out a role: this time as aunt” (Edenfield 63). If Rosa has remained only “in an uncomprehending stasis” (Brooks 305), she would not, and could not, reach out more than once after forty-three years to her kin. Doubtlessly

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14 Another explanation for summoning Quentin is she wants him to accompany her to Sutpen Hundred. It is a reason offered and proven later. But I would argue that it is part of her intentions, because the trip takes place in the evening, and before that she has kept Quentin in her house the whole afternoon listening to her story.
Sutpen’s animalistic suggestion has remained a formidable obstacle to her life, but I would assert, after having gone through Rosa’s messages in her talk, that Rosa’s primary concern has always been in the preservation of southern honor and duty, both women’s and men’s. By going up to Sutpen Hundred, she is trying to salvage what remains of a southern family line and keeps her promise to her sister Ellen to “protect her remaining child” (AA 18). Rosa learns and Rosa acts. This time as an aunt, a duty ensued by her societal roles, her promise to another human being, as well as her belief in her right to act. That she is denied the final role naturally brings her death. An agony far greater than the anger at her broken engagement, she is driven into total despair and never recovers.

Faulkner once said “I think that as fine an [influence] as any young man can have is one reasonable old woman to listen to, an aunt, a neighbor, because they...have held families together and it’s because of families that a race is continued” (Jelliffe 70). Quentin’s sitting indoors to listen to Rosa’s story is a significant beginning to understand not just the Sutpen history, but the values of a past world that still holds powerful sway over the minds of the living. Rosa’s whole life is a living testimony to a woman’s frustrated struggle to cope with her roles. When Rosa dies, she dies with no identity for a southern woman. She is simply “Miss Rosa” as Quentin insists. It points to the most poignant irony in the interpretation
of her story: she is first edged out and then dismissed by the very men and society she wishes to serve. That Quentin should fail to detect this fact beneath her angry attack at Sutpen blocks out the final hope for him. He will soon face the same dilemma in *The Sound and the Fury*, when his wish to fulfill a last role as a protector of the Italian girl is mocked hideously by an arrest, a trial and a fine. It is no wonder that having gone through the final tribulation, Quentin would go quietly to his end.
Chapter II  The Black Shadow

The previous chapter aims at an examination of how Rosa and Quentin are shaped by the old value of the South and become victims of the same fate. This examination, however, covers only part of the conflicting forces working on Quentin in a social context. A native born and raised in the South, Quentin comes to confront, just as every other white in his region, the problem of race, an issue taken up time and again by the Faulknerian scholars.

Irene Edmonds mapped out two underlying themes popular with later critics, “the curse of slavery and the horror of miscegenation” at the collective psyche of the South (193). Edmonds pointed out that “the Negro” is the very cause behind the dichotomy of the burden and obsession of the white Southern conscience, and that the double themes of curse and fear run through most of Faulkner’s work (192).

Edmonds’ foresight is proved by continued discussions in Faulkner’s characterization of Negroes as well as in his treatment of race relations. Irving Howe, in looking into Faulkner’s novels of earlier and middle years, largely confirmed Edmonds’ opinion that Faulkner was obsessed with Negro characters. “The horror of miscegenation” released in Faulkner “phobias of white consciousness” and produced some “most intense,
involuted, and in a few instances hysterical writing” (Howe 86). Speaking about the effect of racial issue on Faulkner’s mind, Aeron Steinberg agreed with Edmonds and asserted that Negro as “the black shadow” is actually “at the very core of Faulkner” (12). Steinberg argued that Faulkner’s portrait and management of Negro characters in the bulk of his works manifests a “deeply ingrained hostility” and the Negroes must be viewed “in relation to something other than themselves...as emotional scapegoats and props” (12-13).

It seems that the earlier critics have reached an agreement in terms of the psychological implications of Negro characters for Faulkner and his white characters, and this agreement has found support with quite a few Faulknerian scholars. James A. Snead further clarified this point, saying that the presence of race is not a problem to be examined in its own terms, nor was Faulkner “primarily concerned with the suffering of blacks” (152). He pointed out 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...Faulkner’s characters...live under a body of racial barriers and prohibitions that structure the self-understanding of Yoknapatawpha County. The futility of applying such strictly binary categories to human affairs...dramatize the problematics of division through sensitive white characters such as Quentin Compson, Darl and Addie Bundren, and Ike McCaslin (152).

After all, the identity of a Southern white man has largely determined the perspective under which Faulkner would approach the Negro subject and
project some of his deepest concerns. As Faulkner himself confirmed that “the white man can never really know the Negro” (*Faulkner in the University* 211), the center of consciousness throughout Faulknerian stories naturally remains with the white.

The white characters of Faulkner’s novels ponder on the racial issues and struggle with their ambivalence on the curse and horror of racial division. For them, the Negro is more than a phenomenon in his own self; it has become a shadow, the black shadow in the criticism of Edmonds and Snead. A famous passage from *Light in August* will bring forth the connotation of the black shadow to the white of the South.

“I had seen and known negroes since I could remember. I just looked at them as I did at rain, or furniture, or food or sleep. But after that I seemed to see them for the first time not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people. I thought of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white, with the black shadow already falling upon them before they drew breath. And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross... The curse of the black race is God’s curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God’s chosen own because He once cursed Him” (*LA* 246-47).

In her dialogue, Miss Burden projects both the curse and the fear, symbolized by the “cross” and the “black shadow.” While she speaks, Joe Christmas lies beside her, listening in silence. The image of the two living under the same roof and trying to communicate somehow is symbolic of the lives of most white Faulknerian characters intertwined with that of Negroes (Moreland 160).
Yet in all of the discussion of the black shadow, fewer critics have paid attention to Quentin Compson’s racial psyche along this line of argument. Quentin is traditionally not considered a good specimen when examining a white man’s racial consciousness. The reasons might be several. For one thing, Quentin’s other problems have overshadowed his racial mindset. Faulkner had Quentin devote a large portion of his remembrance to obsessions with the past, to the father-son as well as the brother-sister relationships. By contrast, he does not seem to be possessed by racial imaginations in the same degree. For another, Faulkner’s novels yield better representatives than Quentin on the black white issues, like Joe Christmas, Ike McCaslin, Miss Burden, Chick Mallison. So even when critics did touch upon Quentin’s racial bias, the comments they offered were often fragmentary, though illuminating at times.

For example, Aaron Steinberg concluded that Quentin perceives all Negroes the same, that he regarded “the particular Negro” as “the generalized concept” (75). For Quentin, there is no difference between Deacon and Roskus, that the former is merely a reflection of the latter (76). Steinberg saw in Quentin the tendency to use the Negro to measure the behavior of the whites, for a purely functional purpose (77). There is similarity in the views of Quentin and Jason with regard to some aspects of the Negro life, but Steinberg did not explore this interesting observation
further (80).

Perhaps a more exclusive inquiry into Quentin’s racial attitude comes from Lee Clinton Jenkins. He also believed that Quentin holds an “ingrown prejudices” against Negroes, even when Quentin tries to be honest about the humanity of Negroes (Images of the Negro 25). Jenkins illustrated with examples the disparity between Quentin’s conscious attempt to take people for what they think they are and his habitual generalizations of Negro behavior as “obverse reflection” of the white. Quentin’s awkwardness in confronting a confident Deacon reveals his preference for the meekly obedient old Negro on the mule (Black-White Relations 154-57).

The above critical comments on Quentin, though insightful in their own terms, have not covered all of Quentin’s broodings on the Negro and the race problem. Quentin’s racial bias may not be compared in the same anguished state as that of Ike McCaslin, Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas or Chick Mallison. Yet, Quentin exhibits a wide range of feelings towards Negroes, though not in degrees of intensity. Noel Polk described the complexity in a white man’s mind, saying

Faulkner had demonstrated his cognizance of the complicated feelings that white men have regarding Negroes. These feelings range from paternal condescension through nostalgia about childhood companionship with Negroes to guilt and to feelings of superiority or to general resentment of Negroes (144).

The very representativeness of Quentin’s ambivalence on the racial divide
just lies here: a range from paternal condescension, through nostalgic memories to guilty and general resentment. Having an abstract, intellectual mind, Quentin’s concern and ruminations speak more of the average mental climate of the Southern white. In a way, his attitude also embodies the Compson family’s approach to the Negro: a significant lack of appreciation as well as emphatic understanding.

Quentin typifies the condition of the educated whites where they feel the pull of two conflicting forces: the traditional code and the sense of a more essential justice. On the one hand, Quentin’s prejudice becomes less overtly racist and more polished, yet boils down to the very same thing: the denial of humanity to the Negro. On the other, Quentin cannot be blind to the curse and horror in slavery and is virtually on the point of a psychological break down at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* Therefore, he is in dilemma. He cannot escape it in alcohol owing to his sense of justice, nor does he possess Ike’s courage or Chick’s willingness to help mend the evils in his tradition. The consequence of such a conflicting attitude complicates Quentin’s problem and further removes him from his society.

In this part of the paper, I am going to adopt the position of Edmonds and Snead that the curse and horror of slavery has become a shadow over the lives of the white in the South. Chapter Two attempts to investigate the racial mindset of Quentin in two ways. First, it looks at a curious fact
in the story of *The Sound and the Fury*, that is, the near-absence of Dilsey in Quentin’s narrative. It argues that Dilsey’s near invisibility in Quentin’s memory is not a coincidence on the part of the William Faulkner, but is perfectly in keeping with the Quentin’s reluctance to accept humanity in blacks. Then, I will go on with a further study of Quentin’s narratives involving the black, each taken out of their respective contexts of *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* My argument is that for Quentin, the racial shadow is reflected in his abstraction of individual blacks as the collective Negro, a separate, inferior species. But his knowledge of the community story has sharpened his understanding of the white heritage in which the attainment of past ideals is sacrificed by rigid inhumanity. It follows naturally that young men like Quentin could not fulfill their social roles as they find it impossible to reconcile their loyalty and sense of justice.

1. The Near-Absence of Dilsey in Quentin’s Narrative

Faulkner’s strength when dealing with black-white relations stems from his unique perceptive lens of placing the Negroes in the background. When he described Caddy from the memories of her brothers, he extended the same treatment to Dilsey, molding her roles and significance through the prejudiced eyes of the white men she has taken care of all her life. A
better understanding of the black-white relations in the Compson’s world, I believe, is surmised not only from what the critics hold Dilsey to be, but from the attitudes of the Compsons towards the Negroes.

In this respect, Quentin presents a particular interesting example. My belief is that Benjy, due to his idiocy, is not capable of understanding and behaving according to the norms of human relations. On the other hand, Jason the miser does not care for any human touch, and would rate people only in terms of mercenary profit and gain. These two are quite unfit to be taken as examples of approaching the attitudes of average whites, who were in some way educated, noticing the racial differences, but in general would treat the Negroes reasonably as they saw fit. Therefore, in between the two extremes Faulkner presented Quentin, a Harvard student, sensitive, longing for love, concerned with honor and family name. He is the only Compson child the reader gets closest to a well-educated, observant and somehow sympathetic, average white man. Naturally we could expect to interpret his thoughts and behaviors towards the Negroes as something more indicative, and perhaps reasonably representative, of the prejudice and ambivalence of the long-established slavery imparting into the minds of the white in the American South after the Civil War.

In the Compson household, Dilsey is an indispensable member, as
much as the Negroes used to be part of the white family scene on the plantation. She nurses the sick, cooks for the household, takes care of the children, protects the small from the bully of the bigger ones, and bears the grumbles and ill-treatment of the white masters while providing sound, tender reassurance at times of the needy. She is almost always at the scenes of chaos with a loving hand and a forbearing heart.

The idea that Dilsey is in general a character of moral strength, understanding, generous and loving, has become a consensus among the critics. Whatever Faulkner did to help his reader to achieve such an understanding, he did not seem to do it through the reflective lens of Quentin. A comparison of the other sections with Quentin’s section will reveal a marked difference in Dilsey’s appearances. With Benjy’s narration Dilsey appears in nearly all the important family scenes, Damuddy’s death, Benjy’s name change, Quentin’s death, the visit to Mr. Compson’s grave, Sunday breakfast before the church episode, Benjy’s birthday, Jason and Quentin’s quarrels and fights. The other brother Jason tells about Dilsey with relation to Caddy’s baby daughter being brought home, Dilsey’s secret arrangement for Caddy to see her daughter, as well as in extended details about Jason’s fights with his niece Quentin in the Sunday breakfast scene. In the author’s section Dilsey occupies nearly half of the first part, with the Sunday breakfast scene and the
church episode. In the above narratives, Dilsey appears with gradually extended, fuller portraits. By contrast, Quentin remembers Dilsey only in bits and pieces. More often than not, she is reduced to a name, a voice, a woman with no visible face.

Quentin’s memory offers seven pieces of narratives that contain Dilsey’s name. At first sight, the number itself may not necessarily signify a prejudice, for Dalton Ames, Caddy’s lover, appears no more frequent in this section than Dilsey. But Dalton is given long, extended description while Dilsey’s name merely pops up a second and then vanishes for long stretches of Quentin’s story, to be surfaced in much the same manner somewhere later. In some, the mentioning of Dilsey has quite functional purpose like a marker of time; in others, Quentin’s memory, instead of contributing to the character-building of Dilsey as the memories of Benjy and Jason do, obliterates her individuality by merging her with the Negro race. To illustrate this, I will begin with passages where Dilsey’s presence is least important, and move onto the passages where it seems to suggest a quality in Dilsey. The first example is a passage where Dilsey’s name appears only for a functional purpose.

I held the point of the knife at her throat
...
Caddy do you remember how Dilsey fussed at you because your drawers were muddy
Don’t cry
Im not crying Caddy
Push it are you going to
In this passage, Dilsey’s name appears to clarify a day Quentin could not forget. In his anguish Quentin reminds Caddy of a childhood day when she muddies her drawers in the river. The image of muddiness imprints on young Quentin’s mind and works out its association with Caddy’s loss of virginity. Apparently, the mentioning of Dilsey is only to remind his sister of that memorable day on Quentin’s mind. “Dilsey” serves here simply as a time-marker, like a date in the calendar or a folded page in a book. Dilsey the woman is not Quentin’s concern, let alone her character.

In another passage when Quentin remembers Dilsey’s name, her name is mingled with other blacks to form an image of blackness for Quentin:

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. But I thought at first that I ought to miss having a lot of them around me because I thought that Northerners thought I did, I didn’t know that I really had missed Roskus and Dilsey and them until that morning in Virginia. The train was stopped when I waked and I raised the shade and looked out ... there was a nigger on a mule in the middle of the stiff ruts, waiting for the train to move ... he sat straddle of the mule, his head wrapped in a piece of blanket, as if they had been built there with the fence and the road, or with the hill, carved out of the hill itself, like a sign put there saying You are home again (SF55).

The context of the above passage is Quentin’s musing on the character of “niggers” and his remembrance of seeing an old nigger on his journey home. Evidently, “Dilsey” here is once more a mere name. In Quentin’s characteristic, abstract mind, Dilsey is generalized into the group of “niggers” that are the “obverse reflection of the white people,” thus losing
individuality of her own. Her name is mentioned together with Roskus, and their meaning to Quentin gains illumination from a much more impressive image of an old man and his mule. While Jason's practical mind forces him to face Dilsey's determination, Quentin's preoccupation with his own world places Dilsey as one of the multitude outside himself. Instead of the dynamic woman moving around the household, she is mixed with the whole Negro servitude in his imagination: serene, static, expectant and reassuring to the white psyche. Dilsey is not yet a woman; she is a name, a “nigger,” the collective Other. She survives here as an abstract symbol.

Even in the few flashes of Quentin's memory that Dilsey does appear as an individual voice, she is a much diminished character with scanty remarks scattered around. An example will illuminate this point. In the following passage Quentin is recalling an accident in his teenage days, which follows his remembering of Caddy's talk of her marriage:

*Caddy you can't do it if you are sick. That blackguard. I've got to marry somebody. Then they told me the bone would have to be broken again

...inside me it began to say Ah Ah Ah and I began to sweat....He came along the fence every morning with a basket toward the kitchen dragging a stick along the fence Every morning I dragged myself to the window cast and all and laid for him with a piece of coal Dilsey said you goin to run yoself aint you got no mo sense than that not fo days since you bruck hit. (SF72)*

Dilsey finally resumes her voice, this time as a fussing motherly figure. But what merits our attention is the fact that nothing follows her remark
of concern afterwards. Quentin suddenly drops the memory of re-breaking his leg, and so ends Dilsey’s admonition there. Does that contribute to our understanding of Dilsey, or Quentin’s view of her?

The abrupt and casual manner is typically of Quentin’s remembrance of anything related to Dilsey. He picks up her name, has her speak a few words, then passes on to something more of his concern. One very short episode has Quentin’s mind jump from one association of death to another, “… two six-pound flat-irons weigh more than one tailor's goose. What a sinful waste Dilsey would say. Benjy knew it when Damuddy died. He cried. *He smell hit. He smell hit.*” (*SF* 72). The associations emerge when Quentin goes to a bridge to hide his flat-irons, looks at his shadow on the river that reminds him of the Negro’s saying about “a drowned man's shadow…watching for him in the water all the time” (*SF* 72). The disconnected images all point to death: the shadow, flat-irons, Damuddy’s death, Benjy’s perception through smell. In between them the lament is actually not Dilsey’s, but one imagined by Quentin to imitate Dilsey’s response to his coming suicide. The words do suggest Quentin’s knowledge of Dilsey’s character: that she would disapprove of his choice and think it a sin. But Quentin is neither bothered by his imagination nor has intention to be concerned about her. It is on his own family he contemplates. The following episode, in which Quentin’s thoughts drift back to his childhood
days, highlights his habit of mentioning Dilsey and forgetting her in the midst of his own preoccupations.

Honeysuckle was the saddest odor of all, I think. I remember lots of them. Wisteria was one. On the rainy days when Mother wasn’t feeling quite bad enough to stay away from the windows we used to play under it. When Mother stayed in bed Dilsey would put old clothes on us and let us go out in the rain because she said rain never hurt young folks. But if Mother was up we always began by playing on the porch until she said we were making too much noise, then we went out and played under the wisteria frame (SF 108).

In this passage, the manner Quentin handles his memory sequence places Dilsey in a quite subordinate role. The paring of phrases “When mother stayed in bed” and “But if Mother was up” defines the situation as belonging to the mother portraits. Dilsey’s name is introduced to mirror Mrs. Compson’s ways of raising children. Quentin recalls that Dilsey would let the children play in the rain. But their mother would have them play under the wisteria frame. In contrast to the freedom the children gain from Dilsey, the orders they receive from Mrs. Compson is to stay away both from the rain they enjoy and from the mother they expect to love. It might be worthwhile to bear in mind that the longings for a mother run very strong with Quentin: in fact it is one of his central preoccupations.

Not surprisingly, this piece of memory places Mrs. Compson at the center. Dilsey’s name appears in the middle part to sharpen Mrs. Compson’s inadequacy as a mother, and then to bring the memory back again to the white mother. Such handling of Dilsey indicates that she is held by
Quentin to be largely functional, not so much in her service to the whites as in the vision she becomes an “obverse reflection” of certain behaviors of the white.

The last two incidents involving Dilsey’s name emerge out of Quentin’s memory of Benjy’s name change. Like the previous examples, they also pertain to the differences between the white and the black. Let me begin first with a shorter quote:

*He smell what you tell him when he want to. Dont have to listen nor talk.*
*Can he smell that new name they give him? Can he smell bad luck?*
*What he want to worry about luck for? Luck cant do him no hurt. What they change his name for then if aint trying to help his luck?* (SF 56).

The dialogue, presumably taken place between Dilsey and her son Versh, seems to be a more important piece than the previous passages because it presents Caddy as speaking good sense. In one way, it does cast Dilsey as a wise woman, who refuses to buy the idea that changing the name would bring luck to Benjy. But pause and think, has not such an understanding already existed with the reader? Benjy’s section actually has fuller details on Dilsey’s response to the changing of names:

*His name’s Benjy now, Caddy said.*
*How come it is, Dilsey said. He aint wore out the name he was born with yet, is he.*
*Benjamin came out of the bible... It’s a better name for him than Maury was.*
*How come it is, Dilsey said.*
*Mother says it is, Caddy said.*
*Huh, Dilsey said. Name aint going to help him. Hurt him, neither.*
Folks dont have no luck, changing names. My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me.
How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said.

_It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out._
_Can you read it, Caddy said._
_Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here._ (SF37)

This episode in Benjy's memory sets Dilsey disagreeing with the excuse of good luck in changing the name. In addition, it shows Caddy to be a woman of sound faith in God. Compared with Quentin's memory of Dilsey talking about Benjy's name and luck, Benjy's telling proves to be much more to Dilsey's advantage. Then, did Faulkner have Quentin repeat Dilsey's idea partly because the changing of name suggests something Quentin is concerned with? This might be a possible answer. I would venture, however, that an alternative interpretation lies in looking at the broader context in which Quentin's memory about Dilsey appears. At this moment of the story, Quentin is boarding a train to the river with two flat-irons as aids for his suicide. On the train he sits beside a “nigger,” which triggers a long line of his conscious and unconscious thoughts. The piece on Dilsey is one of these flashes of memory going through Quentin's mind. Below I have summarized a list of Quentin's wandering thoughts in the order as they appear.

_Framing event in the present: Quentin's sitting beside a nigger._

_Flashes of memory triggered:
A. Reflections on the word “niggers”

B. Encounter with an old nigger and a mule on his journey home from Oxford

C. A classroom experience in which he clumsily counts down time before the bell rings

D. Benjy’s instinctive knowledge of Caddy’s loss of her virginity

E. Dilsey’s comment on Benjy’s ability to “smell” others’ talk and her remark on the changing of name

Back to the present: Quentin on the train and the nigger passes him to get off.

Tracing the sequence of Quentin’s memory at this part of the novel, I propose that the flashes of memory primarily revolve around Quentin’s idea of the black people. Considered in this light, Dilsey’s remark is part of the larger scene and functions not as a repetition to highlight Dilsey’s disagreement, but to relate her perception to Quentin’s interpretation on the curious character and mystic power of the blacks. Episodes A and B are directly related to Quentin’s understanding of blacks as the “obverse reflection,” possessing “timeless patience...static serenity: that blending of childlike and ready incompetence and paradoxical reliability” (SF 56). In episode C Quentin extends the concept of black “static serenity” to
contrast his restless fidgeting about time, his failure to “come out even with the bell” (SF 56). So the perception of black serenity in face of time is the opposite, or the “obverse reflection” of Quentin’s obsession with time as a white man. Episode D interprets Benjy’s primitive power of knowledge, which is readily accessible to such blacks as Dilsey and Roskus. In episode D Dilsey offers a simple explanation for Benjy’s behavior that “He smell what you tell him when he want to. Dont have to listen nor talk” (SF 56). Therefore in their primitive, uncivilized, clumsily innocent and mystic manner Benjy and Dilsey belong to the same people. Luster’s question “Can he smell that new name they give him? Can he smell bad luck?” follows Dilsey’s remark on Benjy’s ability and is a further inquiry into his primitive power (SF 56). Dilsey’s last comment on Benjy’s name, through dismissal of the talk of luck, illustrates Quentin’s idea of the intuitive perception of the black.

If the above illustration of Dilsey serving as an example to pinpoint the differences between the white and blacks is not adequate enough, there is one more opportunity provided by Faulkner to trace Quentin’s habit of recalling Dilsey in relation to his musings on black character. Following is the passage with Dilsey’s name in it:

Benjamin the child of. How he used to sit before that mirror. Refuge unfailing in which conflict tempered silenced reconciled. Benjamin the

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15 Roskus too talks about Benjy’s power to understand people dying without ever seeing it “He know lot more than folks thinks...He knowed they time was coming, like that pointer done. He could tell you when hisn coming, if he could talk. Or yours. Or mine.” (SF 20)
child of mine old age held hostage into Egypt. O Benjamin. Dilsey said it was because Mother was too proud for him. They come into white people's lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope; the rest of the time just voices that laugh when you see nothing to laugh at, tears when no reason for tears. They will bet on the odd or even number of mourners at a funeral. A brothel full of them in Memphis went into a religious trance ran naked into the street. It took three policemen to subdue one of them. Yes Jesus O good man Jesus O that good man (SF 108).

The passage demonstrates perfectly the characteristic that marks Quentin's remembrance of Dilsey: the tendency to link her with the black people and to approach her in such a manner. Dilsey's name appears at the point of Quentin's wondering on his mother changing Benjy's name. Unlike the previous example, Quentin remembers Dilsey as directly hitting on the heart of the matter: that Mrs. Compson changes her son's name because she is “too proud for him” (SF 108). As we know, Mrs. Compson changes her son's name when the five-year-old boy is discovered to be a sure idiot. Mrs. Compson’s attitude on having an idiot son is an open secret since she seldom fails to show her detest of the Compson’s “bad blood” and her pride in her maiden name (SF 66). While the Compsons have avoided talking about the real motives of Mrs. Compson, Dilsey the black woman comes straight to the truth. However, Dilsey’s strong assertion does not mean her standing as an individual voice. Once more, Quentin swiftly moves onto his observations about blacks’ living among the whites: they are “sharp black trickles” that “isolate white facts in an
unarguable truth” (SF 108). So for Quentin black people like Dilsey serve to bring about the facts, or truth in white men’s life. Yet, he narrows their function with the modifier “for an instant” and says that the rest of the time the blacks are utterly unapproachable because they are “just voices that laugh when you see nothing to laugh at, tears when no reason for tears” (SF 108). Next, Quentin follows his observation by recalling the curious behaviors of the black men. Where is Dilsey then? She might be again forgotten, left out of his memory.

Reviewing the seven episodes concerning Dilsey in Quentin’s section, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that Quentin’s memory for the most part does not reveal in her the qualities reflected in his brothers’ section. Her permeating presence is instead reduced to a minimum. In the few recollections Quentin further hollows out her presence by setting her up against the white, amplifying a blackness in her that he finds mystifying and alien. To Quentin, Dilsey belongs to the “black trickles” that come into his mind only to illuminate for him the “white facts.” There she is to remain merely “for an instant” (SF 108), because Quentin’s preoccupations have always been with the white family and community.

Is there anything blamable in Quentin being concerned with the “white facts”? Certainly there is nothing wrong in itself. But unlike Benjy and Jason, Quentin is a thinking man. He defines his relationship with
the world around him with his meditations. And it is often in his intellectual thinking we perceive his character and dilemmas. His memories of the familial trouble indicate that Quentin is attempting to hold on to a moral code forsaken in the other members of the family. Considering Quentin’s desire for love, sympathy, understanding and emotional support, and Dilsey’s willingness to offer gestures of love and support, it would seem very odd that Quentin should not have found in Dilsey a surrogate for his ineffectual mother Mrs. Compson. Yet Quentin chooses to ignore the generous Dilsey when he has been plagued by family honor and motherly virtues. His refusal to grant her a larger role might suggest an approach to put the blacks at the back of his mind: that they are alien and as such should remain in the background; that in intellectual terms the blacks are not the concern of the whites.

Generally speaking, Quentin shows little interest to expand his remembrance of Dilsey beyond the point of serving his immediate purpose. Sensitive and sometimes sharp in his observations, Quentin remembers Dilsey usually in brief episodes that erase her personality. Although he acknowledges some enduring qualities in her such as patience and reliability, he holds a concept of the blacks as mysterious, alien and inferior, an idea essentially the same with Jason’s. Thus it is not a surprise to find Quentin rarely mentions Dilsey. To him, Dilsey is simply
one of the blacks who are “just voices” (SF108).

2. Quentin’s Narratives Involving Blacks: Abstraction and Ambivalence

The second part of Chapter Two pushes forward the discussion on Quentin’s racial bias in two aspects: a look into the abstract imagery that Quentin employs for his understandings of the black, and a review of the ambivalent status Quentin assumes in reconstructing the Sutpen legend. With this further study, I hope to establish the idea that Quentin suffers an ill adaptation and brings himself despair when he remains ambivalent about the consequences of denying the same humanity to the black people.

A man reared in the tradition of the South, Quentin’s attitude towards the Negro is far from the “politically correct” stance. His aversion to anti-slavery ideas is revealed in his answer to Shreve, his Harvard roommate and a Canadian who has no concept of slavery. Shreve remarks on Deacon, a black man who works for Harvard students and is seen in the parade on Decoration Day, “There now. Just look at what your grandpa did to that poor old nigger.” Quentin returns sarcastically, “Yes... Now he can spend day after day marching in parades. If it hadn't been for my grandfather, he’d have to work like whitefolks” (SF 52-53). Shreve’s observation speaks the mind of the outsider who views the subjugation of blacks as a natural evil and holds compassion towards the black people.
Yet for Quentin, the “natural” feeling he assumes is viewing Deacon as a specimen of the Negro problem: laziness at work and eagerness to jump in at opportunities to avoid duties.

In Quentin’s retort, Deacon, the only black that Quentin knows outside his Southern community, is reduced to a nigger who acts just as Quentin believes a nigger will do, “I never knew even a working nigger that you could find when you wanted him, let alone one that lived off the fat of the land” (SF 53). Deacon would appear in “whatever parade that came along.” He commands “a white boy of about fifteen” to do his job for the students (SF 52, 62), while he himself talks incessantly, brags and cheats as Quentin remembers,

From then on until he had you completely subjugated he was always in or out of your room, ubiquitous and garrulous, though his manner gradually moved northward as his raiment improved, until at last when he had bled you until you began to learn better he was calling you Quentin or whatever (SF62).

It is interesting to note that Quentin’s memory and refection of the Negro begins with his observation on Deacon. Such an attitude is representative of his approaches towards the black people. At the time of offering his remarks, Quentin is in Harvard, away from his home and community. However, Quentin’s response to Shreve indicates he rejects the idea of a non-Southerner. Although Quentin claims that “the best way to take all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are,” he is never able to fulfill this rationality in practice (SF55).
More importantly, in retorting Shreve Quentin shows his strong identification with the South in defending its position on the Negro. Moreland aptly explained that

having still to bear guilt for violating a moral code, South has developed a special resentment against Negroes as causes of misery and perpetual reminders of shame...also has supersensitive reaction to accusations and suggestions from the North (33-34).

Shreve's “Northern” attitude draws a line at which Quentin is constantly aware of. It is against Shreve's attitude that Quentin begins his observation on the Negro. Quentin' aversion to Shreve's opinion and his observation on Deacon is indicative of a strongly resistant attitude to recognizing the Negro as beings of the same humanity. It is a code of resistance “by southern white man to the enfranchisement of Negroses after the war” (Moreland 34).

The most dehumanizing aspect of the Southern code is to treat the Negro as a separate, distinct social phenomenon, a species both opposite and inferior to the white. Faulkner had his white characters employ metaphors or generalizations, “figures of division” as named by Snead, to indicate their superiority in the racial relationships (155). Snead contended that the town of Jefferson uses highly rhetorical language to maintain the social divide, such as “a negro's job at the mill,” “that nigger murderer,” “working like a nigger” (157-159). As such linguistic collocations become fixed into everyday usage, the only way open to
perception and knowledge is to follow these reference frames.

Quentin readily takes up these reference points. Steinberg noticed Quentin's tendency to jump from the individual “he” to the collective “they” when he ruminates on blacks and black behavior. For Quentin, “the particular negro is always the generalized concept” (73-75). In Quentin's eyes, the Deacon at Harvard could be melt into the Roskus at home. The old Negro and the mule he meets on his journey home are no longer individuals but the representative of the Negro race “with that quality about them of shabby and timeless patience...that blending of childlike and ready incompetence and paradoxical reliability that tends and protects them” (SF56). On a trolley, seeing “the only vacant seat...beside a nigger” lets Quentin's mind leap effortlessly from “nigger” to “niggers”: “I used to think that a Southerner had to be always conscious of niggers” (SF 55).

Quentin does not stop with mere metaphors or generalizations; he actually merges them to create his most famous definition of the Negro: “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” (SF55). In this definition Quentin demonstrates his inclination to think of “a nigger” not only in a collective sense, but also in a light that deprives the Negro of human qualities: they are not human beings, merely a “form of behavior.” But the
most important aspect of Quentin’s thinking is to view the Negro as having relative values only from their contrast with the whites. Lothar Hönnighausen interpreted Quentin’s definition as follows,

A black person in this definition, instigated in the young Southerner by the experience of the North, appears as ‘invisible man’ and nonperson to the point of being an abstraction...‘nigger’ for the intellectually conscious Harvard student...is taken as an indicator of the moral condition of white society (196).

Few of the Faulknerian characters exhibit the degree of abstraction that Quentin achieves with his definition of the nigger; and few have demonstrated as Quentin does the range of a white mentality. By reducing a black man to the collective, dehumanized, and relative context, Quentin surpasses many white characters in being the spokesman of the white code.

The other simile that Quentin uses to complement the definition is his comparison of blacks to objects, something again having no personality on their own:

They come into white people’s lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope; the rest of the time just voices that laugh when you see nothing to laugh at, tears when no reason for tears. They will bet on the odd or even number of mourners at a funeral. A brothel full of them at Memphis went into a religious trance ran naked into the street. It took three policemen to subdue one of them (SF’108).

Quentin’s use of simile once more places the black in the context of the white life. The function of the black is to “isolate white facts.” In itself this may not necessarily be a negative value, considering Quentin’s
dissatisfaction with the deteriorating moral condition in his society. Nevertheless, as Quentin comprehends the black life in terms of inanimate, lifeless “trickles” and “microscope,” the “black facts” become separate from humanity. Another distinct phenomenon, the black feelings “tears,” “laughter” and behaviors “betting on funeral,” “religious trance” incite aversion and dislike from the white mind.

As I have said, Quentin does not seem to be a racist character. His preoccupation with family problems and image of ineffectualness overshadow his participation in racial issues. The observation he makes on the black is reduced in menace due to his habit of thinking in abstract terms. However, Quentin cannot escape the blame of being a racist, if Noel Polk’s standard is applied here. According to Polk, racism means either a hatred or fear of Negroes, or a belief in the inferiority of Negros (145). Quentin undoubtedly fits the latter if not the former criterion. We have seen that Quentin is the only one of all Faulkner characters that gives shape to the most racist definition of the black. His racist feelings will emerge more when compared with his brother Jason.

Quentin and Jason share the same code as Southern men. Steinberg noted that the brothers agree on one idea regarding the Negro: their laziness (80). Jason bitterly thinks the blacks in such light. He hates Dilsey and others who work for him, believing they are lazy and useless
“that kitchen full of niggers and not one of them had time to life a tire onto the rack and screw up a couple of bolts” (SF 151). In the same manner, Quentin blames Deacon, saying “I never knew even a working nigger that you could find when you wanted him, let alone one that lived off the fat of the land” (SF53).

Besides labeling blacks as lazy, there is a more important aspect of the brothers’ understanding. They think that the black tend to cross the boundaries and dominate the white masters over time, that is, they both feel that as whites and as masters, their lives are in peril. Jason accuses Dilsey of meddling in his affair with Caddy, grumbling “That's the trouble with nigger servants, when they've been with you for a long time they get so full of self importance that they're not worth a dam. Think they run the whole family” (SF130). In Jason's eyes, Dilsey is a nigger who forgets her duty and interferes with the master. Like Jason, Quentin complains about the intrusion of black Deacon on his life:

From then on until he had you completely subjugated he was always in or out of your room, ubiquitous and garrulous, though his manner gradually moved northward as his raiment improved, until at last when he had bled you until you began to learn better he was calling you Quentin or whatever (SF62).

In Quentin's description, Deacon is an interfering, fussy fellow in the presence of whites. He is cunningly shrewd, taking advantage of the improved relationship with the white he serves. So far the critics seemed to overlook this aspect of similarity in the brothers’ attitude. Jason's
acculsations do not convince the reader as he is generally considered a morally bad character. His comments often serve a contrary purpose by exposing his own weakness. However, if we do not get side-tracked by the reliability of their remarks, we would notice that the brothers’ observations sound startling similar in terms of resentment towards the black people.

Quentin’s attitude has not received much censure because he is not seen as an innately “bad” or morally “weak” character. Yet his opinions of the black man reveal an essentially racist mindset. One very revealing clue to Quentin’s contempt and mistreatment of the Negro is his kicking of T.P. on Caddy’s wedding. On that day Benjy can hardly be hushed quiet and T.P. takes him down to the cellar to get some “soda water,” the drinks for entertaining guests at the wedding. Both T.P. and Benjy get drunk, Benjy screaming and T.P. falling on top of him, laughing. Drawn to the noise, Quentin kicks T.P while Caddy puts her arm around Benjy to reassure him (SF 25-26). The episode of Quentin beating T.P. does not appear in Quentin’s part of the narration, but in Benjy’s. It is interesting to note that for some reason, Quentin has chosen not to remember this detail. Yet the physical abuse is an indicator of how much Quentin has concealed his prejudice, and how far his bias against blacks could go. Quentin’s use of violence emerges even more disturbingly when he is
compared to Jason, who, though despicable, has not attempted handling the Negro by the same means.

Dividing blacks from the white is the code Quentin inherits and constructs unconsciously to maintain his sense of identity in his own disintegrating world. With the black, the best relationship Quentin could form and feel at ease is the master-slave one, which is represented by the image of the old Negro and the mule as Quentin rides the train home from his first Harvard winter holiday. When the train stops at a road crossing, Quentin looks out of the widow to see

an nigger on a mule...his head wrapped in a piece of blanket, as if they had been built there with the fence and the road, or with the hill, cared out of the hill itself, like a sigh put there saying You are home again (SF 55).

Quentin’s mood immediately brightens and he starts to joke at the nigger,

“Hey, Uncle,” I said. “Is this the way?”
“Suh?” He looked at me, then he loosened the blanket and lifted it away from his ear.
“Christmas gift!” I said.
“Sho comin, boss. You done caught me, aint you.”
“I’ll let you off this time.” I dragged my pants out of the little hammock and got a quarter out. “But look out next time. I’ll be coming back through here two days after New Year, and look out then.” I threw the quarter out the window. “Buy yourself some Santy Claus.”
“Yes, suh,” he said. He got down and picked up the quarter and rubbed it on his leg. “Thanky, young marster. Thanky” (SF 55).

There are two points to observe in Quentin’s characteristic abstract thinking. First of all, he recognizes the most popular image of the Negro and of the South itself. George Ellenberg explained that mules “provided
common ground for black and white southerners, especially after the Civil War...and became a fundamental part of ‘southerness’” (385). Once Quentin sees the mule, he knows he is on Southern land. This “southerness” is an integral part of him and it in turn affects his way of thinking, which links the mule with the Negro. T.J. Walter noted that

with many persons, the mule and the negro are intimate by association, under the impression that the obstinacy and hardiness and endurance of the one, were naturally adapted and related to the low degree of intelligence and brutality of the other” (qtd. in Ellenberg 388).

The old nigger’s slowness to respond to Quentin’s question best illustrates Walter’s point about “the low degree of intelligence” in the Negro. In associating the Negro and the mule Quentin’s clearly endorses the image as a reassuring home metaphor. There is nothing more telling about the racial mindset of Quentin when his warm feelings spring from patronizing the Negro’s ignorance and servitude.

The encounter with the old nigger on the mule is the only occasion on which Quentin exhibits his gentlemanly best: humorous, composed, warm, generous, relaxed and reassured. The old man humbly responds to Quentin’s jest and acts out his role of a subordinate in rank. The encounter displays Quentin’s idea of benevolent master-slave rhetoric, with both sides understanding and performing social rituals allotted to their status. The master acts the kind, gracious master and the nigger respectful, pleasant, contended.
The most prominent image, the Negro on his mule, fits in very well with Quentin’s nostalgic mentality. A widely spread home metaphor in the South (Ellenberg 391), it gives Quentin an understanding of social relations and a sense of belonging. But beneath this seemingly benevolence lurks the undertones of a black servitude because “slaves viewed the mule as ever-present part of life in bondage” (Ellenberg 384). It represents the labor hierarchy and the status quo where the black are so subdued that they take up the master’s frames of reference. Quentin’s happiness, however, is precisely grounded on this status quo. His desire to see the Negro and his mule as a static background, a happy recipient of the white’s paternalism reveals “paradoxical dependence of white men upon the black men whom they despise” (Moreland 151). Psychologically, it presents Quentin’s eagerness to retreat to a home where everything would be in its old, orderly place. That Quentin cannot fulfill this desire leaves him ever sensitive about blacks crossing the barrier, as he is alert to the black presence at Harvard and on the streetcar.

Quentin’s homeward longings are not easily satisfied because his vision of home is rooted in the Southern code where niggers “act like niggers” so that he could act out his social role of a benevolent master (ID 61). At Harvard Quentin’s concept is thwarted by Deacon who refuses to be placed in a master-slave relationship. The frustration Quentin feels is
obvious and he balances it by equating Deacon’s behaviors to
generalizations of Negro habit, which are essentially negative and racist.
He also attempts to visualize Deacon in the image of Roskus, a much more
subdued and humble Negro working for the Compsons. Quentin’s
approach to Deacon shows his dislike and distrust of those black who
break the Southern code, in which “a subordinate role for the Negroes is
customary, and for some of the white folks...that role is vital to their own
existence” (Moreland 116).

From Quentin’s negligence of Dilsey it is evident that Quentin does
not bother to spare any more time and mind on the niggers who work as
loyal subordinates. Therefore Quentin’s dependence on the master-slave
code is essentially of the social and psychological need of the white to
assert their identity and masculinity in society. With Deacon Quentin gets
nowhere and in Harvard he is not recognized among his peers. The only
possible outlet and comfort resides in his home environment where at
least some of the Negro, the old man on the mule, Roskus and Dilsey, can
set his mind at ease and give him a sense of direction. No wonder
Quentin’s memory strays homeward throughout the major part of his last
day at Harvard.

Should Quentin’s memory of the Negro have ended with The Sound
and the Fury, he would have appeared a different man: one who
rationalizes with cool contempt on the subject of racial relations and with a bit of nostalgia longs for integration into his native community. Accordingly, there would have been little racial anxiety in Quentin’s anguish and frustrations. The problem of race, as Quentin muses in *The Sound and the Fury*, is not of the white’s; it is the Negro who refuses to be the “obverse reflection of” the white (*SF*62).

Installing Quentin as one of the central narrators in *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner brought Quentin’s cultural concern into sharp focus, thus clarifying his problem as having a broad social dimension. What *Absalom, Absalom!* reveals is a story of intense confrontation with the race issue (Craig Werner 45). In reconstructing the Sutpen legend, Quentin’s detachment and nostalgia gives way to his sense of guilt and torture. There are two main stories of choice and destiny in the Sutpen legend, each involving one generation: Sutpen, his son Henry and Bon. On the surface, the stories contain alternative interpretations: the love story, the father-son story, and the black-white story which reflect each of the narrators’ preoccupations. But I would argue that the essence of both stories remains unchanged: the problem of miscegenation, which holds Quentin in its firm grip and adds to his psychological affliction by challenging his loyalty to his inheritance.

Sutpen’s story is rendered by Quentin as one of cold calculations to
fulfill his ambition, an ambition of great industry, but with visible flaws of injustice at the core. Sutpen has set as his finial task “a design,” which requires “money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family” (AA 263). The first four tasks Sutpen manages to complete on his own. For the last one he needs a wife, which is how Sutpen judges rationally as a businessman does his deals. In Sutpen’s eyes, the loyalty to his blood is of vital importance, which is the reason he explains to General Compson that before the marriage contract, he “accepted them at their own valuation while insisting...upon explaining fully about” himself and his progenitors (AA 264). Learning she has Negro blood, Sutpen “repudiated that first wife and that child when he discovered that they would not be adjunctive to the forwarding of the design” (AA 262).

Sutpen’s repudiation of his first marriage mirrors the mental condition of the white man in the South with regard to interracial relationships. Miscegenation is either shunned, or if it does exist for some reason, is at best settled with a financial arrangement. Sutpen is not blind to the “injustice in what he did” (AA 262). Yet the knowledge of injustice would not prevent the head of the plantation family from turning his back on his child because the mixed-blood impurity “rendered it impossible that this woman and child be incorporated in the design” (AA 254). The initial bite of conscience Sutpen feels towards deserting his wife and child soon
passes away because he has “argued calmly and logically with his conscience until it was settled, just as he must have argued with his conscience about his and Mr. Coldfield’s bill of lading” (AA 262). Sutpen’s conscience even takes pride in rationalizing that “he had obviated that as much as lay in his power being aboveboard in the matter” and leaves to his wife and son “that portion of it which had been specifically described and deeded to him in the marriage settlement” (AA 262).

Jennie Joiner noted that the racial purity was a central concern of the white, both prior to and after the Civil War. In the antebellum South slavery ensured the white man’s sense of purity and supremacy, whereas it became necessary to establish new laws after the Civil War brought down the previous social institution of master and slave (26-28). From 1860s onward miscegenation laws “became the prominent form of constructing ethnic and racial boundaries—predominantly to secure white racial purity—after slavery ended” (Joiner 29). In other words, Sutpen speaks the truth when he remarks to General Compson that “he could have simply deserted her, could have taken his hat and walked out” (AA 262). By the Southern code, Sutpen has done more than the legal or moral aspect of his duty calls him for. For example, Ike McCaslin, the counterpart of Quentin, learns from the family ledger that Old Carothers McCaslin makes his Negro daughter Tomey pregnant and brushes the
matter aside by leaving “the thousand-dollar legacy to the son of an unmarried slave-girl” (GDM 256). In Jefferson, Sutpen’s relationship with his Negro gives him a mixed blood daughter Clytie, for which no white man blames him. In both cases, there is no mention of marriage and the best settlement is the financial compensation out of the free will of the white man.

Sutpen and Old Carothers have both remained loyal to their own blood, despite the outrage of injustice they bring to the Negro women and children. None of the white men questions Sutpen or Old Carothers on their relationship with the Negro and mulatto women. In Quentin’s narration, he is aware of this because his grandfather General Compson does not blame Sutpen’s repudiation in terms of conscience or justice. Instead, upon learning Sutpen’s idea of counting on his wife’s adherence to the deal, General Compson is appalled, thinking that Sutpen has been too naïve with a mulatto woman: “didn’t the dread and fear of females...teach you better? ...what conscience to trade with which would have warranted you in the belief that you could have bought immunity from her for no other coin but justice?” (AA 256). General Compson’s question exposes the difference between Sutpen and his first wife: females, not ladies or women.

Quentin recalls how white men have broken down the other sex...into three sharp divisions, separated ...by a chasm which could be crossed but one time and in but one direction—ladies, women, females— the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the
courtesans to whom they went while on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom that first caste rested and to whom in certain cases it doubtless owed the very fact of its virginity (AA 109).

By Southern legal and moral laws, the only match for a white man is a lady. The marriage of a white to a “female,” slave or mulatto woman, is inconceivable and not protected. Referring to Sutpen’s first mulatto wife as “females,” General Compson has hinted at the “justice” of Sutpen dissolving the marriage.

What disturbs Quentin is not only Sutpen’s self-assumed righteousness in arguing for his desertion of the mulatto wife and son, Quentin also shows an uneasiness at Sutpen’s cold treatment by comparing it to a “cleaning up of the exploded caps and musket cartridge” (AA 265, 266). Recalling that Sutpen names his son “Charles Bon, Charles Good,” Quentin contemplates the naming as a process in which Sutpen again applies his conscience...the same conscience which would not permit the child, since it was a boy, to bear either his name or that of its maternal grandfather, yet which would also forbid him to do the customary and provide a quick husband for the discarded woman and so give his son an authentic name (AA 266).

Although trying to avoid direct comment on the possessive urge and dominance Sutpen exercises over his mulatto family, Quentin’s narration cannot hide his muted discomfort and sarcasm. Sutpen’s use of marriages to achieve his design leads Quentin to relate the name of Sutpen’s son Charles Bon to “Charles Good...Charles Goods” (AA 266), a knowledge
that Sutpen handles his family as object of trade (Joiner 71). The quick repudiation and the lack of public censure attest the truth of white men’s adherence to the racial divide, a concern that remains with the Sutpens and the Compsons, with the older generation as well as with the young.

Even Bon, the victim of Sutpen’s desertion, has in turn exploited and taken advantage of the racial caste system in the other sex. In Mr. Compson’s conjecture about Bon’s murder, Bon is described to have held a New Orleans’ attitude towards the mulatto women, different from Henry’s provincial code of strict stratification. Bon counters Henry’s protest against his interracial marriage, first saying the mulatto mistresses are “not whores,” but “the only true chaste women...in America” (AA 116). As white men “created them,” it is also their duty to save at least “that one” (AA 117). But beneath Bon’s polished idea about mulatto women his understanding of interracial relationship is just as severely stratified as Henry’s, or perhaps worse, since he brushes away Henry’s concern of the “ceremony” as

a formula, a shibboleth meaningless as a child’s game, performed by someone created by the situation whose need it answered. A crone mumbling in a dungeon...something in a tongue which not even the girls themselves understand anymore, maybe not even the crone herself...since the very fact that we acquiesced, suffered the farce, was her proof and assurance of that which the ceremony itself could never enforce; vesting no new rights in no one, denying to none the old—a ritual as meaningless as that of college boys in secret rooms at night, even to the same archaic and forgotten symbols? (AA 117-18)

Bon’s casual dismissal of the “ceremony” puts Henry, who would have
welcomed Bon’s repudiation of the woman, on his alarm. Mr. Compson imagines Henry, with his puritan stubbornness, insists that the ceremony is sacred, and that the inability to understand the language spoken on the occasion should not make one “less obliged” (AA 118). The differences with the two friends are: while Henry refuses to give legal status to interracial relationship, Bon makes light of both convention and law. Showing little true concern for his octoroon mistress, Bon has trodden the same path as his father Sutpen by defining the ceremony as a formula “performed by someone created by the situation,” whose language he does not understand (AA 117). A “man of the world” from New Orleans (AA 111), the sophisticated Bon is revealed to be more racist and irresponsible on the matter of interracial marriage than the deeply traditional Henry.

“The trump card” Bon plays to silence Henry demonstrates Bon’s exploitation of the caste system. Bon reminds Henry, “Have you forgot that this woman, this child, are niggers? You, Henry Sutpen of Sutpen’s Hundred in Mississippi? You, talking of marriage, a wedding, here?” (AA 118). Mr. Compson’s assumption is that as a white man, Bon would ultimately side with his tradition on the matter of interracial relationship, an assumption touches the essential agreement between Henry the provincial young man and Bon the seemingly liberal one: that by the Southern code they would not recognize unions with non-whites. Bon’s
romanticizing the “females” offer no real reconciliation on the matter of miscegenation. Rather, his relationship is established by “the situation” (AA 117), which he uses to uphold his status and ambition—an attitude like that of Sutpen, Henry and Old Carothers. The exploitation of “females” and the neglect of the mixed-blood families are established by social convention, so that the victim Bon himself becomes a victimizer.

Mr. Compson’s narration describes Henry, the white son of Sutpen, as a young man who has inherited the old social code just like his forefathers. Henry accepts the three divisions of the other sex and is accustomed to young men finding pleasure with “females”:

[W]ith girls of his own class interdict and inaccessible and women of the second class just as inaccessible because of money and distance, and hence only the slave girls, the housemaids neated and cleaned by white mistresses or perhaps girls with sweating bodies out of the fields themselves and the young man rides up and beckons the watching overseer and says Send me Juno or Missylena or Chloy and then rides on into the trees and dismounts and waits (AA 109-10).

The racial and gender-based exploitation gives the young white foundation to build their racial and caste superiority, which is the reason Henry argues long and hard with Bon on the latter’s marriage with a mulatto woman. In Mr. Compson’s interpretation, the conflict of Bon and Henry is not that Bon refuses to leave the mulatto mistress, but that Bon has entered into “a ceremony...with a negro” (AA 110). Mr. Compson imagines that Henry feels frustrated and tries for years to assimilate Bon’s “marriage” with a Negro. Henry finds his integrity of belief at peril
because Bon’s act destroys the established custom of a sacred marriage, which will blur the color line and threatens white supremacy. The consequence of such a relationship is to “make [Henry’s] sister a sort of junior partner in a harem” (AA 119), a condition that Henry as a white man would not accept. Therefore, Mr. Compson concludes that Bon’s illegitimate marriage with a mulatto is the very reason for Henry killing him. Although Mr. Compson’s inference is significantly lacking in moral strength and emotional charge compared with Quentin and Shreve’s version, it presents a remarkably similar concern on miscegenation, the racial mixing, which is at the center of all problems.

Mr. Compson’s version of Bon’s murder provides a direction for Quentin to understand the Sutpen tragedy. In Quentin’s version, the conflict and horror of miscegenation is amplified so that the young whites like Bon and Henry are revealed at their most vulnerable. Quentin interprets Bon’s reason for marrying Judith as retaliation against Sutpen’s refusal to acknowledge their kinship. When Henry asks Bon if he must marry Judith, Bon’s long reply reveals his bitterness at Sutpen’s rejection:

“He should have told me. He should have told me, myself, himself. I was fair and honorable with him. I waited. You know now why I waited. I gave him every chance to tell me himself. But he didn’t do it. If he had, I would have agreed and promised never to see her or you or him again. But he didn’t tell me...He just told you, sent me a message like you send a command by a nigger servant to a beggar or a tramp to clear out” (AA 341).
Bon refers to Judith only once in his response. He makes it clear that marriage with Judith is a means to his end: to approach Sutpen. Bon’s anger springs from his frustrated desire for Sutpen’s recognition. The marriage then, is a roundabout way to reclaim the natural bond with Sutpen the father. Quentin speculates that Henry, overwhelmed by Bon’s emotion, promises his half-brother to reconsider the matter: “I understand. But you will have to give me time to get used to it” (AA 341). In Quentin’s rendering of the events, Henry then tries for four years to convince himself of the acceptability of the incestuous marriage between Bon and Judith. Out of his love of Bon as the friend and half-brother, Henry is compelled to “reconcile what he knew he was going to do with all the voices of his heredity and training which said No. No. You cannot. You must not. You shall not” (AA 342-43). Reconciliation does come as Henry asserts that “Lorraine duke” and “lots in the world” must have done it without people’s knowledge (AA 343). With the new conviction Henry even braves Sutpen in bold defiance, “Brother or not...now I have had four years to decide in. I will. I am going to” (AA 354).

Henry’s strong attachment to Bon gives him strength to ignore incest, but he is defeated by Sutpen’s “trump card”: the revelation of Bon’s black blood. He is speechless when Sutpen tells him “He must not marry her, Henry. His mother’s father told that her mother had been a Spanish
woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part negro” (AA 354-55). Unlike the long years it takes for him to decide on incest, Henry immediately reasons his situation out, because “he knew what he would do; it now depended on what Bon would do, would force him to do, since he knew that he would do it” (AA 355). The contrast is alarmingly ironic since it discloses the weight of the issue of miscegenation on the white mind: a forbidden ground where Henry who has repudiated the birthright for his love of Bon would feel obliged to fight back his friend. Caught between the Southern code and the love for his brother, Henry is silent and dejected, listening to the shrewd Bon pointing out the real problem: “So it is the miscegenation, not the incest, which you can’t bear” (AA 356). Meanwhile, the knowledge of Sutpen sending no word to him has fanned Bon’s anger. Bon is hardened into a determination of marrying Judith against all odds. He challenges Henry, “I’m the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me” (AA 358).

The tragedy comes, and for Quentin, it is a tragedy on multiple levels. Henry, the heir to the white tradition, chooses to kill Bon, and then erases himself from his community forever, leaving Sutpen heirless. The “design” of Sutpen, sire of one great plantation family, is wrecked. From Rosa and Mr. Compson, Quentin has learnt of how Sutpen’s moral state degenerates
as his fortune plunges downward, until his shameless desertion of Milly provokes Wash Jones’ bloody revenge. The meeting with the ghostly Henry at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* forces Quentin to recognize the outcome of Henry’s choice: “the wasted yellow face…the wasted hands…waking or sleeping it was the same and would be the same forever as long as he lived” (*AA* 373). On the impact of their meeting on Quentin, David Paul Regan remarked, “Far from being a confirmation of significance, a reward for the defense of honor, Quentin discovers a wasted man whose life has finally stood for nothing” (18). The curse of the slavery and the horror of miscegenation have never presented itself with such full force in previous Faulkner novels (Edmonds 193). The young generation of white men labors under its burden and is prevented from any happy accomplishment of their social role. Bon and Henry die in conflict. Judith and Clytie spend their life bringing up Etienne, son of Bon and his mulatto mistress, only to find the boy hate his white blood with a vengeance just as much as Bon longs for the white father.

The horror of crimes and waste of human lives as a result of sticking to white heritage leaves no room for escape. Although Quentin attempts to quiet his mind by reading Mr. Compson’s advice in the letter: “let it be hope—that the one cannot escape the censure which no doubt he deserves, that the other no longer lack the commiseration which let us hope...that
they have longed for” (AA 377), he could gain neither hope or pity at the end of constructing Sutpen legend—a legend that mirrors the failure of the Southern code with a subjugation of human beings to artificial rules. Quentin muses at the end of the story, saying he is “older at twenty than a lot of people who died” (AA 377). The knowledge of sin breeding its own doom as well as an awareness of being part of it drives Quentin “panting in...dark,” claiming “I dont hate it! I dont hate it!” (AA 378)

Faulkner’s primary intention might not be the presentation of racial issues, but it did not prevent him from giving an insightful sketch of the true circumstances of the black-white conditions. Quentin's obsession has always been with his white family. His Southern code, in the context of The Sound and the Fury, might demonstrate an unconscious need to push the blacks into the recess of the white psyche. In Quentin’s section the blacks are grouped into much more shadowed, much more abstract images. Quentin’s manner of memorizing, clearly colored by the logic of slavery, might be very indicative of an attitude among the educated white in the troubled years after the American Civil War.

At the same time, Quentin’s plight and despair under the racial issue surface most poignantly in the reconstruction of the Sutpen story in Absalom, Absalom!, since he has identified himself so strongly with the Southern tradition but now finds the cultural faith shattering down even
on its own grounds. As Quentin and Mr. Compson narrate the story of the Sutpen household, Quentin in particular becomes conscious that Sutpen’s design, the source of his pride and supremacy, rests on the maintenance of pure white blood with a denial of justice to his mixed blood wife and son. The ensuing stories of the next two generations, with its crime and waste of human lives, sharpen Quentin’s knowledge of sin breeding its own doom in his inheritance.

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, there is evidence of Quentin being caught between desire for justice towards Bon the black man and the demands of the Southern heritage to remain loyal to his own race. Edmonds touched upon Quentin’s dilemma in this dichotomy by saying in searching for a possible understanding of “history and society in terms of present day relationships” Quentin has no answer except “the futility of suicide” (192). Sociologist Douglas also said that suicide could take root in an individual’s inability to adjust to the change in social status (138). However, the conclusion I draw for this chapter is that Quentin’s ambivalence on the issue of race compounds his agony in the outside world, complicating his loneliness and completing his retreat from the community scene. What awaits Quentin at home, to his dismay, is a world no less disorganized and confused than the larger society itself, as I shall argue and present in the following chapters.
Chapter III  The Dungeon of Parenthood

_The Sound and the Fury_ is Faulkner’s masterwork on family history, called by Thomas L. McHaney as “the modernist variation upon the family chronicle novel” (149). The book not only traces with the help of the brothers’ sections the major events that shape and determine the end of an aristocratic household, but has the added advantage of a detailed Compson Appendix to help consolidate the facts of a family line, spanning 250 years.\(^1\) Confined to a single family of sterile love and disruptive conflicts, the characters are drawn with vivid reality to point towards an irrevocable loss and disintegration.

Interestingly, _The Sound and the Fury_ is not alone in the presentation of the troubled family image. For example, Faulkner’s _Absalom, Absalom_! and _Go Down, Moses_ have presented in similar spirit the breakup of two other families: the Sutpens and the McCaslins. His fictions are believed to be preoccupied with the disintegration of families and men in the South. But the gloomy fate does not wait merely at the door of Faulkner’s families. Cindy Weinstein, commenting on the existence of large numbers of fiction with bereaved children in the antebellum period, concluded that the reader

need only look at abolitionist accounts of the ravaged family life (both

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\(^1\) See Appendix Compson 1699–1945, in William Faulkner, _The Sound and the Fury_, p. 203.
black and white) on southern plantations or pro-slavery accounts of family life among workers in the industrialized north to see that, at least from the point of view of many Americans in the antebellum period, the family was in deep trouble. The sense that the family isn’t what it used to be is the starting point for an impressively diverse range of textual offerings (20).

Hence, to think of the well-known heroes offered by the famous authors is to trace a long tradition of “families in shambles and children bereft of loving parents.” The reason behind the literary representation, according to Weinstein, is the widespread belief about the inability of family to fulfill its social roles. The literature prior to and around the antebellum South “is not simply reflecting a cultural preoccupation with defining the family but is participating in that project in an attempt to make sense of the changing complexion of the members within it” (27, 30).

In this sense, Faulkner was surely writing within the tradition when he drew for the reader of deeply troubled family relationships as well as the individuals whose development as personalities is no less disturbed or distorted. The Compson family, to borrow from John Earl Bassett’s comment, is a typical one that is “both physically and mentally sick” (410).

But, if there is something deeply wrong with the families in Faulkner’s works, what type of problem would be there, and in particular, what is wrong with the Compsons? To this question critics have offered similar interpretations. The most comprehensive treatment of family problems in Faulkner’s works comes from John Earl Bassett, who, in
tracing the development of family issues through Faulkner’s career, argued that by the late 1920s:

Certain themes and patterns became dominant: sibling rivalry for love of the mother; bad mothering and ineffectual fathers; homes from which young people seem excluded or homes to which they have a hard time returning; pathologically alienated young men; and incestuous connections between brothers and sisters that suggest a displacement of love for the mother (409).

Confining his discussion to *The Sound and the Fury*, Basset actually said the failure of the Compson family is “emotionally grounded in maternal betrayal and paternal inadequacy” (408). With this judgment he laid the blame squarely at the door of Mr. and Mrs. Compson.

While Basset did not further evaluate the respective roles played by each of the Compson parents, earlier criticism, such as the comment from Lawrence Bowling, saw Mrs. Compson more blamable. Bowling considered Mrs. Compson “the primary corrupting force in the Compson family” (476). His observation was based on the premise that “in Faulkner writings, the center of the family circle (and the source of its love) is the mother. What is wrong with the Compson family is that it has no center, no mother and no love” (477). Consequently, the family falls apart. Brooks placed his heaviest censure again with Mrs. Compson even though he considered Mr. Compson an important factor in the family’s disintegration as well.

The basic cause of the breakup of the Compson family—let the more general cultural causes be what they may—is the cold and self-centered mother who is sensitive about the social status of her
own family, the Bascombs, who feels the birth of an idiot son as a kind of personal affront, who spoils and corrupts her favorite son, and who withholds any real love and affection from her other children and her husband. Caroline Compson is not so much an actively wicked and evil person as a cold weight of negativity which paralyzes the normal family relationships (*Yoknapatawpha* 334).

Pursuing the topic further, Brooks believed Mrs. Compson to be “at the root of Quentin’s lack of confidence in himself and his inverted pride.” She is “the immediate cause of her husband’s breakdown into alcoholic cynicism,” and “ultimately responsible for Caddy’s promiscuity” (*Yoknapatawpha* 334).

Sally R. Page, in her assessment of the mother figure in Faulkner’s works, agreed with Brooks about Mrs. Compson, declaring that “the Compson family is dying because Mrs. Compson is incapable of loving or caring for her children; she is a total failure as a mother” (47). Similar perceptions are scattered in Faulkner studies, but basically adhere to the idea about the source of blame for family decline being either or both of the Compson parents, usually with Mrs. Compson bearing a harsher judgment.

A more recent study is found in Gary Storhoff. In his article on the exploration of alcoholism as a functioning principle to organize the Compson’s household, Storhoff identified the family trouble as a concerted effort on the part of all members to sustain an alcoholic father, whose control of the family is manifested in his dismissal of all emotions,
stabilized in his wife's self-pity, and finally secured in his daughter's guilty conscience, loveless marriage and hasty divorce. It is only natural that the Compson family should fail as a site of moral guidance and emotional intimacy (111-30). Storhoff’s study, while offering insights into the risks facing an alcoholic household, contributes to earlier criticism on the responsibility of parental behavior, this time with Mr. Compson taking a fuller claim to dysfunction, the behaviors of his wife and daughter as essential subsystems to support the family's emotional and interactive pattern.

There are, however, some dissenting voices on where the problem lies. A few have tried to relieve the parental figures from being the scapegoat. Two typical ideas are exemplified in the efforts of Joan William and Bernice Berger Miller. William attempted to read Mrs. Compson in the light of a disabled yet still caring and sympathetic mother figure, whereas Miller’s analysis of hero-archetypes involved casting Mr. Compson as a wise old man, and Mrs. Compson as a terrible mother in the archetypal model.17

With the present paper, I agree with the critics in a large measure: that Mr. and Mrs. Compson are responsible for the much of the pathetic condition the family is in. But I would like to add to the discussion by specifying the nature of responsibilities attributed to each of the Compson

17 See respectively Joan William, pp. 402-407; and Bernice Berger Miller, pp. 65-70.
parents, and in particular the impact on Quentin that devastates his sense of a reliable existence. A fundamental problem, in the case of the Compsons, as I am convinced to argue and present in the following chapter, lies with how the children perceive and construct the image and influence of their parents on their own lives. I believe that causes for Quentin’s suicide can be discovered in following the same path: to see how Quentin views the interaction of him with his parents and the influence they have on his life.

My conviction is grounded in the family and individual development theory, which gives interpretations to parental management patterns and assesses children’s behaviors within the system. Sociological studies recognize and support a major function of family as nurturing a trust in “not only something that is good but also something that is reliable and durable”, without which “the personal growth of a child cannot take place, or such growth must be distorted” (Winnicott 44). The fulfillment of this function, according to some studies, lays the responsibility primarily upon the shoulder of parents. Herb Etkin’s research on “Fear and Underachievement” pointed out that “parenting is the most important element in the process of the growth of confidence” (17). Previous studies also converge on Etkin’s conclusion, stressing that in the formation and maintenance of a child’s basic identity, “repeated significant parental
failure is of primary importance,” that even though “the child's idiosyncratic behaviors should not...be excluded... prominence has to be given to parental inability to respond empathically to critical developmental needs” (qtd. in Etkin 17).

It must be born in mind that sociological studies are on the whole tend to be oriented towards the collective phenomena. While Etkin established his claim comparing data from families in which parents either demonstrate good role models or not, he did not adequately account for the fact why the children of the same family are not affected in the same manner. What the study truly reveals is a greater risk in the lives of children whose parents fail their roles. Consequently this lack of adequate answer calls for the need to look for other answers.

To answer this question, sociologists have discovered several factors that influence proneness to suicide, such as family disorganization, sibling position, child-rearing techniques, and parental deprivation (Taylor, Durkheim 127). These factors are all visible in Quentin’s tragedy. It is quite apparent that the Compson family is a disorganized one, with each of the parents failing his or her role, Caddy divorced, Jason cheating, Quentin committing suicide. The Compson household, though intact on the surface with both parents, is equal to the case of parental deprivation. With the father neglecting his duties of supporting the family and guiding
the children, the mother whimpering in complaints against her own husband and children, the children are thrown very much on their own resources, or worse, their sense of self is disrupted by the parents’ irresponsible intervention. The sibling position issue is equally unfavorable for Quentin, who cannot escape the fact that he is the first born son, the heir to the Compsons. On his shoulders weigh heavily the expectations of a family whose fortune has plunged downward. In the following part I will illustrate how Quentin both feels and is repulsed by the expectations, especially when facing Mrs. Compson.

As for the child-rearing techniques, Philip Baker studied parental management of the children, and introduced a model for understanding the power structure of the family, which he interpreted in terms of control. The first type of control is a flexible one, denoting a healthy family maintenance strategy, where parents regulate children’s behaviors on sound but not rigid principles and gain support from children to keep the family physically and emotionally functional. The other three are less desirable power structures. One is the rigid control type, which is highly stable and predictable as far as children understand the family rules, but does little help for the adaptation to changing circumstances either within or outside the family. The second undesirable type is the laissez-faire style of control. As the name suggests, it assumes little responsibility on the
family members and each can have their own way as long as they are not too disruptive. The last problematic type combines the first two and is called the chaotic family, in which signs of low predictability and adaptability compete to make the family a worst dysfunctional one (104-05).

Baker’s model of family control furnished my study with an aid to analyze the Compsons’ parenting styles. It is not difficult to conclude that Mr. and Mrs. Compson’s ways of managing the house is of the chaotic style—a mixture of rigid and laissez-faire. On first look, Mr. Compson’s manner appears more laissez-faire and his wife tends to be an exerciser of more rigid control, but the case is not as straight as that. As we shall see later, Mr. and Mrs. Compson both exhibit traits of the two theoretical extremes in different circumstances, sometimes complicating the existent problems, at other times create new ones for all involved.

The other tool that Barker’s research equips me with is his ideas on the types of emotional attachment between members in the chaotic family. Barker names three types of attachment: the avoidant, the ambivalent, and the disorganized. Avoidant feelings are characterized by the disregard of the child for the attachment figure. Ambivalent feelings make the child instead come back to one or both parents with no apparent reason for feeling safe and comfortable. If a child feels disorganized, however, he does
not have a coherent strategy for coping with separations and reunions, or he may show a mixed pattern of attachment to his parents (105-06).

There are two ways in which Barker’s control and attachment models could fit into my study. First of all, I incorporate his concepts into the analyses of Quentin Compson in order to discover what effects the chaotic management and interaction patterns have created on Quentin’s mind and behavior. It aims to handle the “because” question raised at the Introduction Part of this paper, with a focus on Quentin and his parents.\(^\text{18}\) Here I would probe into the question of what is Quentin’s problem with his parents that precipitates his denial of self-worth and identity.

Secondly, Baker’s attachment types on child-parent relationship work well in Quentin’s case, adding multiple dimensions to the understanding of emotional interaction in the Compson family. For example, it is clear that Quentin’s feelings towards Mrs. Compson are a combination of attachment patterns. On the one hand, he feels repulsed by his mother’s petty talks and provincial vulgarity; on the other hand, he is constantly drawn back to her in the memory, which he finds hard to dismiss and wishes to possess emotionally. It is only after Quentin feels the pang of mother’s verbal abuse that he tries to eliminate her from his memory, but his avoidant feeling are still marked by some ambivalence.

\(^{18}\) Certainly Quentin’s family comprises more than his parents, and his monologue features his sister Caddy so prominently. My arrangement is for Chapter Three to be devoted to an examination of the relationship pattern between Quentin and his parents. Caddy alone will fill the next chapter.
To put simply, the current critical trend on the Compson family matter is at once more objective in attitude and open to new research findings from other disciplines. It is a trend I discover to be beneficial for objective observations on the Compson parents. In following this trend I do not pretend to be original—Basset and Bunnell and perhaps others I have not had the privilege to read have set the stage. But the focus of this paper permits me to venture some more specific observations in the light of sociological studies upon Quentin’s interaction with his parents and their subsequent influences on his ways of perception, which may contribute to the explanation of Quentin’s personality and his despair.

1. Mrs. Compson

The treatment of Mrs. Compson roughly falls into three categories: (1) a consideration of her role as a mother embedded in the study of The Sound the Fury and other Compson family characters; (2) an expanded discussion of Mrs. Compson in the group of women or mothers under a dominate theme encompassing several of Faulkner’s works; (3) a study on Mrs. Compson as a character in her own right (Joan William 402-07).

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The third category sees some new criticism emerge only from the 1980s onward but the body of research is still limited in number, perhaps due to the fact that Mrs. Compson is not, after all, a very significant character in her own right, one showing enough human dimensions to be treated separately. The second group of research offers quite a number of brilliant explorations regarding Faulkner’s women, ranging from Faulkner’s overall female character development, archetypes and symbolism to feminist readings. However, because of the nature of Mrs. Compson’s status in *The Sound and the Fury*, so far the largest body of criticism is still to be found in the first group, where Mrs. Compson is evaluated along with one or more of the Compson males or females.

The general view towards Mrs. Compson as a mother is quite negative. The group of criticism that considers her role amidst the study of other Compson characters has voiced perhaps the harshest opinion. Bowling and Brooks called her a central corrupting force or a curse on the family. With regard to Mrs. Compson’s place in the family, Michel Gresset described her to be “thoroughly...unlikable...completely alienated from her part”, for, as a mother, “instead of taking on her responsibilities, she lets Dilsey, Luster, or Jason shoulder them” (178). As for a mother’s feelings for her children, Mrs. Compson is “cold” and “completely without love” (Carvel Collins 124). She has been identified as responsible for her
husband’s drunkenness, her children’s misfortunes, as well as for Quentin’s suicide.

The other two types of criticism, either handling her in the explorations of Faulkner’s women or as an individual character, have looked upon Mrs. Compson as something close to failure, although the more emotionally charged words like “curse” are removed from the comments. She is mostly described as “selfish”, “unloving”, “hypochondriac”, neglecting her duties of caring for children or offering emotional support. In addition, works of Phyllis Ann Bunnell, Gary Storhoff and Cindy Weinstein added new discoveries to the way Mrs. Compson communicates with the family, by which she comes to exercise her power and wishes upon others.

My argument here is that, instead of merely labeling Mrs. Compson as “selfish”, “cold”, “unloving”—which she surely deserves, I am going to examine and specify Mrs. Compson’s influence on her son Quentin, to discover what precisely are the consequences Quentin suffer that contribute to his move towards the relinquishment of his own life. In this effort, I share with the majority of critics the premise that Mrs. Compson has a major responsibility towards Quentin’s death. My interpretation is that Mrs. Compson not only functions as an unloving, selfish mother that undermines Quentin’s emotional need, compounding his grief, but also is
perceived by Quentin as an active agent guilty of treating him as a sign of social prestige, and of denying his existence as a blood kin in her world.

Mrs. Compson appears a number of times in Quentin’s section in *The Sound and the Fury*. It is only natural, one may think, to meet the important persons in Quentin’s lives; and his mother certainly has a right to claim a place in his monologue. But it is just as unnatural to find that he has never remembered one occasion on which he would speak or respond to Mrs. Compson in a conversation. Had Quentin been a mute or sullen son it would be understandable, but he is not. The reader runs into him constantly pestering his father with the “stupid” questions, pressing his sister Caddy to follow his orders, and challenging his enemies like a young knight. Nor is there any possibility that Quentin does not interact at all with Mrs. Compson in the family. Yet if we compare the other sections, we would once more notice the unusual difference. With Mrs. Compson present in every section, Benjy, Jason, Mr. Compson and Caddy all interact with her, as if to highlight Quentin’s deliberate avoidance. On the few occasions Mrs. Compson speaks in Quentin’s section, he would hold his mouth shut and mentally register her performance. A question naturally presents itself. What holds Quentin back from responding to her mother? Or rather, what is so important in Quentin’s memory of Mrs. Compson’s words and behaviors that reveal about the state of the
mother-son relationship? To answer this question, we must look at the occasions on which Mrs. Compson speaks and seek the reasons behind Quentin's memory of such occasions and its impact on Quentin.

In Quentin’s section, the memory of Mrs. Compson and her words seems to cluster around two family events. One happens right before Caddy’s wedding, with Mrs. Compson meeting Quentin in a car at the train station with Caddy and Herbert; the other is the quarrel between Mrs. Compson and her husband on her setting Jason to spy Caddy, presumably after Caddy’s affair with her lover Dalton Ames is discovered. Chronologically, the second memory should come first and the first the second. The dislocation of time and juxtaposition of scenes collaborate to sharpen Quentin’s sense of confusion and loss. For example, his consciousness of Mrs. Compson proudly referring to him as “my Harvard boy” on the eve of Caddy’s wedding adds only to poignant pain when he recalls earlier conversations of his mother rejecting all her children except Jason (SF'59). In order to describe the state of the mother-son relationship and its impact on Quentin, I am going to examine three aspects of Mrs. Compson’s habitual manners as Quentin remembers: her conventional pride, her image as a mother, and her insistence on being a Bascomb. I will argue that as Quentin’s memory extends from their meeting at the station to Mrs. Compson’s quarrels about Caddy’s loss of virginity, his
mother progressively intrudes deeper on Quentin’s mind, eroding his self-worth and denying emotional support for him to assert identity and place in the family.

From the moment Mrs. Compson opens her mouth as Quentin remembers her on the last day of his life, her conventional pride hurts, alienates and silences him. The first words Quentin recalls about Mrs. Compson speaking are “Harvard my Harvard boy Harvard harvard” (SF 59). In an attempt to introduce her son to her would-be son-in-law, she goes on to say “Harvard. Quentin this is Herbert. My Harvard boy. Herbert will be a big brother has already promised Jason” (SF 59). This piece of short introduction is significant in both the enthusiasm and the symbolic value Mrs. Compson attaches to it. It is not until we finish Quentin’s section that we will realize Mrs. Compson has never again shown any affectionate feelings towards her oldest son; in fact, she has not bothered to mention his name. The rarity of her warmth, consequently, gets no response from Quentin—an indication of Quentin’s emotional distance from his mother. Moreover, Quentin is perceptively aware of the title “Harvard boy”, something like a status symbol to buoy up her mother’s remaining affection. The reader might well remember that Quentin is the first son of the family, and that it is for Mrs. Compson’s wishes that Quentin goes to Harvard. As her son and a gentleman,
Quentin is reminded by Mr. Compson not to disappoint a lady. Quentin intuitively feels his value to a mother who rejects all except Jason to be her flesh and blood. The title “Harvard boy”, as Quentin observes, gives his mother chances to boast in front of the wealthy son-in-law. Quentin’s resistance to her mother’s way of showing off is manifest in his cutting himself off from their talk, remaining mute to the end.

Mrs. Compson’s snobbery is not confined to Quentin’s Harvard status; she loses no opportunity to pursue her satisfaction further. Proudly she mentions Herbert’s generosities. Herbert has promised to be a big brother to Jason, and the car they sit in is Herbert’s present, the first auto in town. In her eyes, Caddy’s marriage is a best “provision” that settles other provisions. The talk about Caddy’s promiscuity will die away; the car from Herbert is an ample token of his financial status, which helps secure the Compson family’s social image; and lastly, it provides a good prospect for her favorite son Jason, the only one of her children “with any practical sense” (SF 60). A further boast to Mrs. Compson’s self-esteem, it is by contrast a shame gnawing at Quentin’s heart, for he comments on her mother’s happiness with a bitter observation “… any blackguard…that could drive up in a limousine with a flower in his buttonhole” could take away his sister Caddy (SF 56). The marriage in Quentin’s eyes is more a deal and a convenience, with Caddy being traded for signs of outward
success. Quentin's knowledge of Caddy's loveless marriage is confirmed by Caddy admitting to him before the wedding that she “can’t even cry” (SF 78). Yet in contrast to his attempts to prevent Caddy from marrying Herbert, Quentin has never shown any signs of trying to communicate with Mrs. Compson, an indication of his alienation from his mother.

Moreover, Mrs. Compson is too engrossed in her success to care for Quentin's response. Her excitement and nonstop tattle about the conventional success tokens—Harvard, car, Jason's prospect—implies that she is not speaking to Quentin, rather, she is speaking about him, the habit which I identify as one of her characteristic ways of communication. In her manner of talking Mrs. Compson is not concerned with speaking to Quentin as a partner in a mutual communication, but with a desire to treat him “on the market,” as goods of value (109).21 Her perception of people in a market sense, her negligence of their reactions, and the preoccupation with her own communication needs, I believe, play a large part in disrupting Quentin’s unified sense of the family.

Before going into the second aspect of Mrs. Compson's mannerisms, the image of a mother she creates for herself, a brief look at the culturally established mother concept in the Southern society will help to pinpoint the differences between Quentin's understanding of a mother's role and

21 The phrase is borrowed from feminist readings of literature, which hold that women's place in the nineteenth century novels is comparable to that of goods in the market, that marriage itself could be seen as a way of consolidating family status through the exchange of women. See Carolyn Porter, pp. 78-122.
Mrs. Compson’s self-constructed one. In a society like the South which held family values as the fundamental ones, the mother was seen as a crucial influence in shaping these values. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century motherhood, Christine Everingham noted, gained exaltation as “the true woman—virtuous, gentle, devoted, asexual, limited in interests to creating a proper refuge for the family and to tenderly guiding her children along appointed ways.” The cult for motherhood reached its heyday in late nineteenth-century, when a mother “was a balm for every wound inflicted by the hostile outside world.” She was imagined to be the angel to whom her children would proudly say upon growing up, “All that I am, I owe to my angel mother” (183-86). The South as a conservative society in that period of history is not exempt from this idealization of motherhood. The code for a respectable white woman in the South allowed her to be only a lady in the roles of wife, mother or virgin (Matthews, *Faulkner and the Lost Cause* 96). As a mother, she was often seen as a carrier of virtues such as gentility, selflessness, submissiveness and passionlessness (Everingham 188).

It must be born in mind that as a young man receptive to influences of virtue and honor in his environment, Quentin carries the preconceived ideas about motherhood into his perceptions and memories of Mrs. Compson. The most revealing clue to the culturally based image is found
in Quentin’s twice lamenting on the lack of a good mother, “If I could say Mother Mother,” and “If I’d just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother” (SF 60, 109). Each time he mourns in the midst of Mrs. Compson’s incessant talk. With his first mourning for a mother he transfers his mother’s affected protest to Herbert on taking her “little daughter away” into his own loss of intimacy and comfort (SF 60). His second utterance contrasts his emotional yearning against Mrs. Compson calling Benjy “the child of my sorrowful” (SF 109). In his lament, Quentin identifies his lack of a good mother with the absence of a mother, eliminating middle ground between “a good mother” and “a mother,” as if to testify Mrs. Compson’s conviction “I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not” (SF 66). It is with these culturally defined ideas of motherhood that Quentin starts his section, perceiving his mother more than a lack, an inadequacy—she is an absence when he cries for “Mother Mother,” for a truly nurturing mother to heal “every wound” of his (Everingham 186).

Mrs. Compson, however, has a distinctively different image of her own adequacy as a mother. She considers herself having labored and completed her task. She declares she has “suffered for” her children. For Caddy, Mrs. Compson claims she has “suffered for her dreamed and planned and sacrificed ...went down into the valley”, and yet Caddy gives her plenty of
sorrow because “never since she opened her eyes has she given me one unselfish thought” (*SF* 65-66). As for Benjy, Mrs. Compson says she “loved him above all of them...because her duty,” even though she knows Benjy is her “punishment” (*SF* 66). She has, according to her, done everything there is to her duty. She is the lady with virtues of devotion, sacrifice embodied in her.

But Mrs. Compson’s self-constructed image must be viewed with doubt, even if we concede that she does “suffer for” the children in the way she gives birth to them. As many critics pointed out, the Compson children are raised by surrogate mothers: Dilsey, Damuddy and Caddy. Caddy takes care of Benjy, hugging, feeding him, speaking to him and taking him out. Dilsey has cared for all the children, including Caddy's daughter Quentin when they are small. Furthermore, Caddy and Dilsey are emotionally attached to the children. Caddy tries to understand Benjy’s gestures and his anxiety. Dilsey grieves for Quentin’s suicide and attempts to protect Caddy's daughter from Jason's physical abuses. The most telling incidence is Jason. The favorite son of Mrs. Compson, he has slept with Damuddy when small, and cries himself to sleep every night after his grandmother’s death. So contrary to her estimation, Mrs. Compson, who is always claiming to suffer from bad health, has actually not done much of her share when it comes to bringing up the children.
The image she truly presents, as if to complement Mr. Compson’s posture of classic scholar, is an image of Classic Mom. When tracing the development of mother image in Western civilization, Everingham described the popular idea of motherhood in ancient Greece to be very different from the nineteenth century sublimation:

In ancient Greece, having borne an heir, a woman consolidated her identity. It was in the delivery of sons, not the raising of them, that she achieved status. No wonder the thrust of maternal concern was childbearing, not child rearing (72).

So in competition with her husband’s exercise of classic knowledge, Mrs. Compson, without her awareness, adopts an attitude steeped in the same origin. Their attitudes carry the same trait of convenience and negligence. If Mr. Compson’s knowledge of ancient wisdom renders him unable to ease Quentin’s concern of the family troubles, Mrs. Compson’s playing Classic Mom cuts her off from Quentin’s yearnings for some warmth and sympathy on mother’s side. Everingham concluded that the Classic Mom attitude uses the children as objects to regulate the mother’s self-esteem. Failure to gratify the mother’s needs leads to a withdrawal of her love and interest (77). Think of Mrs. Compson’s attitude towards her children we have described: her insistence on Quentin’s going to Harvard, her joy at Caddy’s marriage to a banker and in having a car as a present, her pride in Jason being a practical man. Her children are invariably objects to accumulate social prestige for her. Mrs. Compson would abuse
and even deny her love once they fail to meet her demands.

Should Mrs. Compson’s power end here, it might be better off for Quentin because there is still a possibility that the mother wants him for some reason, even for a vulgar reason that repels him. Here I would like to draw the conclusion that one of Quentin’s essential problems is that he yearns for a mother. As he looks to his father for guidance, he too looks for a mother for sense of home and his existence in a bearable world. From the perspective of wishing to preserve the emotional ties of the family, Quentin proves more sensitive and sympathetic than both of his parents.

There is one childhood episode in Benjy’s section which illustrates Quentin’s compassion very well. On the night of Damuddy’s death, Mr. Compson asks them to have supper in the kitchen and be quiet. The children are not told of Damuddy’s death; all they know is Damuddy has been sick. While in the kitchen they hear something and Benjy starts to cry. How does Quentin and others react?

... then we heard it again and I began to cry.
“What was that.” Caddy said. She put her hand on my hand.
“That was Mother.” Quentin said. The spoon came up and I ate, then I cried again.
“Hush.” Caddy said. But I didn't hush and she came and put her arms around me. Dilsey went and closed both the doors and then we couldn't hear it.
“Hush, now.” Caddy said. I hushed and ate. Quentin wasn't eating, but Jason was.
“That was Mother.” Quentin said. He got up.
“You set right down.” Dilsey said. “They got company in there, and you in them muddy clothes. You set down too, Caddy, and get done eating.”
“She was crying.” Quentin said.
“It was somebody singing,” Caddy said. “Wasn't it, Dilsey.”
“You all eat your supper, now, like Mr Jason said.” Dilsey said.
“You'll know in the Lawd's own time.” Caddy went back to her chair.
“I told you it was a party,” she said.
Versh said, “He done et all that.”
“Bring his bowl here.” Dilsey said. The bowl went away.
“Dilsey.” Caddy said. “Quentin's not eating his supper. Hasn't he got to mind me.”
“Eat your supper, Quentin.” Dilsey said. “You all got to get done and get out of my kitchen.”
“I don't want any more supper.” Quentin said.
“You've got to eat if I say you have.” Caddy said. “Hasn't he, Dilsey.” The bowl steamed up to my face, and Versh's hand dipped the spoon in it and the steam tickled into my mouth.
“I don't want any more.” Quentin said. “How can they have a party when Damuddy's sick.”
“They'll have it down stairs.” Caddy said. “She can come to the landing and see it. That's what I'm going to do when I get my nightie on.”
“Mother was crying.” Quentin said. “Wasn't she crying, Dilsey.”
“Dont you come pestering at me, boy.” Dilsey said. “I got to get supper for all them folks soon as you all get done eating.” (SF'16-17)

And a little while later, when supper is finished, the children are about to go to bed:

“I told you Mother was crying.” Quentin said. Versh took me up and opened the door onto the back porch. We went out and Versh closed the door black. I could smell Versh and feel him. You all be quiet, now. We're not going up stairs yet. Mr. Jason said for you to come right up stairs. He said to mind me. I'm not going to mind you. But he said for all of us to. Didn't he, Quentin. I could feel Versh's head. I could hear us. Didn't he, Versh. Yes, that right. Then I say for us to go outdoors a while. Come on. Versh opened the door and we went out.
We went down the steps.
“I expect we'd better go down to Versh's house, so we'll be quiet.” Caddy said. Versh put me down and Caddy took my hand and we went down the brick walk.
“Come on.” Caddy said. “That frog's gone. He's hopped way over to the garden, by now. Maybe we'll see another one.” Roskus came with the milk buckets. He went on. Quentin wasn't coming with us. He was sitting on the kitchen steps.... (SF'18).
The episode stops at this moment with Benjy’s mind turning to the day of Quentin’s death, and does not resume until the end of Benjy’s section when the children are put to bed:

Quentin and Versh came in. Quentin had his face turned away. “What are you crying for.” Caddy said.

“Hush.” Dilsey said. “You all get undressed, now. You can go on home, Versh.”

There were two beds. Quentin got in the other one. He turned his face to the wall. Dilsey put Jason in with him. Caddy took her dress off (SF 47).

The scene illustrates the perception and sympathy Quentin has as a young boy. No other Compson children except Quentin understand that something goes wrong in the family. When Benjy seems to smell with his primitive power the odor of death, Quentin achieves understanding through observation and reasoning. He insists what they hear is crying, and identifies that as from his mother. Once Quentin realizes this, he becomes restless. He argues with Caddy about the impossibility of holding a party when Damuddy is sick, and pesters Dilsey for confirmation of his knowledge. At the same time he is deeply upset and refuses to eat the supper. Lingering behind the others after the supper, Quentin must have finally confirmed his suspicions and learnt the truth. His emotional agony is shown in his crying and turning his face to the wall to hide it from the others. His genuine concern of Mrs. Compson bespeaks a sensitive and compassionate soul who is attached to and cares about his mother and the family. Evidently no other children have been as alert and perceptive as
Quentin. Even Caddy, who is noted for her love and sympathy among the critics, fails to make out what really happens this time.

The childhood story also reveals the consistency as well as the development of Quentin’s attachment to his mother. Most critics are right in saying Quentin feels the lack of a mother when he utters “if I’d just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother,” but very few point out the fact that this urge of Quentin’s is not shown in his childhood. Quentin is the one who, in childhood, notices something goes wrong beneath the apparent calm and evading of questions in the family. Later his perceptive nature carries itself into earlier adulthood to pain at the deep crack between his parents. As the only child who understands and sympathizes with Mrs. Compson at Damuddy’s death, Quentin naturally expects and looks forward to the gesture from Mrs. Compson that will acknowledge his love and offer hers. His sense of home and attachment to his mother must have made his awareness of the absence of maternal love all the more keener and unbearable as he grows up. In this way the childhood episode explains Quentin’s memory of his mother’s talks in which he scarcely plays a part.

Because Quentin’s relationship with his mother remains as one essential in the estimation of his identity, Mrs. Compson’s habit of calling herself a Bascomb when quarrelling with Mr. Compson proves
exceptionally damaging to Quentin’s sense of self-worth. That Mrs. Compson is fiercely protective of her brother Maury is foreshadowed in Benjy’s memory of Mr. Compson ridiculing Maury’s silliness to have been beaten by Mr. Patterson. Mrs. Compson cries at her husband’s indifference and mockery, claiming “my people are every bit as well born as yours” (SF 28). The question about “my people” is cleared up in Quentin’s section when Mrs. Compson speaks after Caddy’s loss of virginity, a chronologically earlier event but is arranged after Quentin’s recall of his mother meeting him at the train station for Caddy’s wedding:

I must go away you keep the others I’ll take Jason and go where nobody knows us so he’ll have a chance to grow up and forget all this the others dont love me they have never loved anything with that streak of Compson selfishness and false pride Jason was the only one my heart went out to without dread... (SF 65)

Here Mrs. Compson is complaining to her husband about the children not loving her. In one stroke of angry attack, she brushes aside all children except Jason, dismissing them as having “that streak of the Compson selfishness and false pride” (SF 65). Having branded the children as belonging to the Compson line, she takes only Jason to be “her people,” a curious and confusing concept considering she has married Mr. Compson, taking the family name along with her children. The blame and threat Mrs. Compson lashes out in her complaints indicates that an invisible crack exists in the husband-wife relationship, that of “parental disharmony” (Hollin 142).
According to Clive R. Hollin’s study on the lack of proper social relationships within a family, “parental disharmony” ranks above all other factors, including the “harsh, rejecting style” of parents, as the topmost one to account for children’s failure (142-44). Quentin’s concern for the parental conflict is shown in his talking with his father over Mrs. Compson’s reaction to Caddy’s affair (SF 62, 64-65). Although Quentin’s questions mostly remain hidden with Mr. Compson doing the talk, he does recall asking an important question about his father’s attitude towards the distinction between “father’s people” and “mother’s people.” While Mrs. Compson’s conflict with her husband is scattered throughout the brothers’ chapters, Quentin’s section shows it up most poignantly, partly because Benjy is unable to reflect, Jason does not feel for his parents, and Caddy has little room in the story to voice what she thinks. So the task of reflecting and agonizing for the consequences weighs only on Quentin’s heart.

Mrs. Compson’s speech declares her sense of separation from her husband, creating for herself a different identity, that of the non-Compson. Her message must have been picked up by Quentin, for a few lines down this speech Quentin recalls the longest rambling grumble in Mrs. Compson’s capacity:

what have I done to have been given children like these Benjamin was punishment enough and now for her to have no more regard for me her own mother I've suffered for her dreamed and planned and
sacrificed I went down into the valley yet never since she opened her eyes has she given me one unselfish thought at times I look at her I wonder if she can be my child except Jason he has never given me one moment's sorrow since I first held him in my arms I knew then that he was to be my joy and my salvation I thought that Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me I don't complain I loved him above all of them because of it because my duty though Jason pulling at my heart all the while but I see now that I have not suffered enough I see now that I must pay for your sins as well as mine what have you done what sins have your high and mighty people visited upon me but you'll take up for them you always have found excuses for your own blood only Jason can do wrong because he is more Bascomb than Compson while your own daughter my little daughter my baby girl she is she is no better than that when I was a girl I was unfortunate I was only a Bascomb I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not but I never dreamed when I held her in my arms that any daughter of mine could let herself don't you know I can look at her eyes and tell you may think she'd tell you but she doesn't tell things she is secretive you don't know her I know things she's done that I'd die before I'd have you know that's it go on criticise Jason accuse me of setting him to watch her as if it were a crime while your own daughter can I know you don't love him that you wish to believe faults against him you never have yes ridicule him as you always have Maury you cannot hurt me any more than your children already have and then I'll be gone and Jason with no one to love him shield him from this I look at him every day dreading to see this Compson blood beginning to show in him at last with his sister slipping out to see what do you call it then have you ever laid eyes on him will you even let me try to find out who he is it's not for myself I couldn't bear to see him it's for your sake to protect you but who can fight against bad blood you won't let me try we are to sit back with our hands folded while she not only drags your name in the dirt but corrupts the very air your children breathe Jason you must let me go away I cannot stand it let me have Jason and you keep the others they're not my flesh and blood like he is strangers nothing of mine and I am afraid of them I can take Jason and go where we are not known I'll go down on my knees and pray for the absolution of my sins that he may escape this curse try to forget that the others ever were (SF'65-66).

Faulkner’ recreation of a mother’s quarrelsome mood leaves the
reader only to marvel at his ingenuity. Devoid of punctuations, the whole passage runs unbroken for more than six hundred words. It presents at one breathless glance the anger, frustration, excuses and fears of Mrs. Compson when she confronts her husband to defend her stance. Mrs. Compson is remembered to announce openly the central problem in her relation with Mr. Compson: the Bascombs or the Compsons. Consequently she sees all the other family troubles as originating from this issue. She calls the Compson line “bad blood,” dreading to see it “beginning to show” in Jason, with Benjy born to be her punishment, Caddy having no more regard for her. According to Mrs. Compson, the reason for her husband finding faults with Jason is because Jason is “more Bascomb than Compson.” In short, she is sacrificing for the sins of the “high and mighty” Compsons. The genesis of such undeserved burden, she believes, is in “putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me.” Resolutely rejecting the other children, Mrs. Compson declares “they’re not my flesh and blood...strangers nothing of mine” (SF65-66)

The disharmony between the Compson parents is no minor case; it is one of the most emotionally and spiritually damaging type for Quentin. In this drama the reader must admit that Mrs. Compson takes the lead and is prone to harsher criticism—whatever Mr. Compson has genuinely felt he disguises it behind the cloak of gentlemanly indulgence and nihilist
cynicism, the destructiveness of which on Quentin will be left for discussion later. For now, the problem with Mrs. Compson’s complaint is that she has done more than simply disagree with and vent her anger at her husband—enough a shattering of Quentin’s idea of the lady’s code on gentility, obedience and silence—she has ventured beyond to destroy the image of a mother for Quentin. I have said that for Quentin the relation with mother is basic in his perception of self-identity. When Mrs. Compson denies her husband and most of her children, insisting on her maiden status as a Bascomb, the family is virtually broken. How is it possible for Quentin and Caddy to view themselves as products of a meaningful reality?

Anthony Gidden explains that self-identity has to be continuous, “something to be routinely created and sustained in the reflective activities of the individual” (52). Quentin’s attachment to his mother has been consistent. In his childhood he observes and identifies himself with the emotion of Mrs. Compson. Before his death he recalls memory of his mother in which he does not really count in her affection. But the crack comes in this continuously reflected biography when his mother rejects him. Quentin’s biography is no longer continuous and intact. To borrow Gidden’s term once more, Mrs. Compson still has the means of a “protective cocoon”—the image of a Bascomb’s lady—to sustain her unity
of selfhood (40). As for Quentin, he has little to turn to. Child of Mrs.
Compson’s marriage which she herself denies, Quentin’ sense of a stable 
external reality and his place in it is seriously impaired. No wonder the 
longing for security is heard in Quentin’s painful cry for “Mother Mother.”

In arguing that Quentin commits suicide as a direct result of his guilt 
for Caddy’s misfortune, Margaret D. Bauer based her conclusion on the 
premise that “critics have often noted that the order of Quentin’s 
memories is...somewhat related to their degree of painfulness to him” (72). 
I would like to apply this observation to Quentin-Mrs. Compson 
relationship. After going through the two occasions on which Mrs. 
Compson presents herself, I argue the reason for Quentin to juxtapose the 
order of these two events lies in the fact that, with regard to the damage of 
his feelings, the occasion on which Mrs. Compson happily presents 
Quentin as an object of value is considerably less painful than the other 
one on which Mrs. Compson fiercely denies any bond to her children and 
the Compson family. Because in attaching a marketable value to Quentin, 
she at least allows him a place in her world. That place for Quentin is 
denied when she poses herself as a Bascomb, and verbally abuses her 
children as not of her flesh and blood.

Sociologist Stevie Taylor asserted that disrupted relationships in 
childhood, particularly disruption of the mother-child relationship, makes
an inability to form lasting relationships in later life more probable and the prospect of anti-social or deviant conduct more likely (Durkheim and the Study of Suicide 127). This is precisely an aspect of Quentin’s despair: his identification with home and a mother have been too strong and consistent, which becomes problematic when later Quentin’s sense of self-worth is nullified by her mother; his existence a null. To remind him of Mrs. Compson is to suffer agony and a depletion of the self. Quentin’s memory of Mrs. Compson stops right after her longest complaint, for the most painful part with mother has been done. As if to echo his mother’s denial, Quentin’s feelings moves from attachment to ambivalence, which translates the lack of a good mother into the absence of a mother, thus interpreting the maternal existence as a void. In the light of Quentin’s struggle to find a meaning for his life, he painfully perceives Mrs. Compson’s emotional alienation and denial, which complicates his problem to operate in the external world where one of his essential links is broken, and where he is to tackle the maternal absence with the remaining alternative and energy.

2. Mr. Compson

The previous discussion on Mrs. Compson presents an analysis of the ways she has influenced, in particular, disrupted Quentin’s sense of trust
and fundamental stability. But he is not yet without hope or help. He still has Mr. Compson in his home environment and to which he does turn for help. Quentin’s instincts are only natural, as Winnicott remarked, because “as long as the family is intact then everything relates ultimately to the individual’s actual father and mother” (133). In reaching out to the remaining parent he could connect, Quentin luckily finds that his father is available, and with him, unlike with his mother, he does interact to a significant degree. Taking into account of the much closer father-son relationship, we can expect that Mr. Compson exerts a no smaller, or even greater, influence on Quentin’s thinking and behaviour. Then, does the criticism concerning Mr. Compson confirm this expectation? And, how do they reflect on the nature of father-son relationship?

To summarize briefly, the study of Mr. Compson centers on one interest: his status as a father in The Sound and the Fury or, occasionally, in Absalom, Absalom!. Obviously we are concerned here with Mr. Compson’s fathering role: his capacity to fulfill his duty and, if unsuccessful, what fails him and what impact the failure leaves on Quentin.

While Mrs. Compson has received different critical comments, the comment on Mr. Compson has largely remained consistent. Critics generally agree on Mr. Compson being a more approachable figure in the
family. For instance, Brooks described him as “a kindly man...not without wit” (*First Encounters* 57), “a man possessed of love and compassion” (*Yoknapatawpha* 335). Robert Penn Warren contended that Mr. Compson is “a man of decent instincts, capable of affection, and able to inspire affection” (252). But the most often discussed aspect is Mr. Compson’s achievement as a fatherly authority and support to children. To this, however, critics on the whole have voiced less positive appreciation. The widely adopted terms for Mr. Compson’s capability are “weak,” “ineffectual.” Brooks said that “Mr. Compson by 1910 was a defeated man...not endowed with the fighting spirit necessary to save his family” (*Yoknapatawpha* 335).

As to the reasons behind Mr. Compson’s impotence, critics offered their views from different angles. Michel Gresset referred to him as a member of defeated South and trapped in the past, “incapable of living in any other present but the golden and dusty time of his ancestors” (178). The weakness of Mr. Compson is often considered a natural product of his philosophy, which is variously identified as “nihilism,” “determinism,” “stoicism,” “cynicism,” or a combination of these terms like “cynical determinism.” 22 For example, H. P. Absalom explained that “Mr. Compson’s cynicism creates a world of sawdust humanity, and personal

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22 For a summary of critical opinions on Mr. Compson’s character, see Bernice Berger Miller, pp 68-70. Also helpful is the analysis of John V. Hagopian, p.205.
insignificance in which ethical standards are reduced to a moral solipsism,” so his existence must demand “the support of the whisky bottle” (151). Ilse Dusoir Lind described Mr. Compson to be in a state of “profound spiritual resignation” (891), whereas Warren pointed out that Mr. Compson withdraws “from the world into stoicism...somewhat diluted by sentimentality and alcohol” (252).

On the impact of Mr. Compson’s passive philosophy and his impotence as the head of family, it is generally agreed that he is in a way responsible for the family disintegration and, in particular, for Quentin’s death. The most severe criticism places the ultimate responsibility upon Mr. Compson’s shoulder, with Mark Spilka and Arthur F. Kinney saying that it is the challenge from the father that drives Quentin to commit suicide. Spilka contended that

it is his father, not Caddy, who dominates his imagination, who tests and undercuts his motives, and who finally determines his suicide...he goads Quentin...to gamble for timeless meaning, to reach and affirm eternal truths through death” (466, 467).

Kinney echoed Spilka’ belief when he believed Quentin dies because “his father...trusts most that he cannot do it...challenges him, in the end, as Dalton and Head and Bland had” (“Faulkner’s Narrative Poetics” 307). Writing on the condition of the lack of support from the Compson parents,
Carvel Collins argued that Quentin’s repudiation of his life is to seek “punishment from his father by falsely claiming to have actually committed incest.” He reasoned that Quentin goes to the extreme of punishing himself because no help or punishment is gained from Mr. Compson (125).

A much milder attitude was taken by Bernice Berger Miller, who argued for the image of Mr. Compson as the wise old man in Jungian model. Miller did not agree with the general view regarding Mr. Compson as a nihilist, for he considered Mr. Compson’s view on woman “a clear understanding of a woman’s nature, and it reflects anything but nihilism” (70). Miller stated that Quentin does not accept his father’s explanation for his own psychic reasons, so the father is merely “unsuccessful in clearing up Quentin’s confusion” (70).

In my discussion on the father-son relationship and its influence upon Quentin, I would like to propose that Quentin turns to his father not only for guidance but also for recognition and affirmation of his self-worth, which is at the core of the interaction between him and his father. Examined from the point view of Quentin’s search for “a form of identification which does not let him down” in his struggle to establish a personal identity (Winnicott 122), the failure of Mr. Compson to guide Quentin through his spiritual turmoil is pathetic, but what is particularly
agonizing to Quentin is his father’s inability to recognize his second need, which means a negation of his emotional identification with the few human beings he can relate to.

Mr. Compson, the head of the Compson household, according to Faulkner’s Appendix, is a failed lawyer who “sold the last of the property” and “sat all day long with a decanter of whiskey and a little of dogeared Horaces and Livys and Catulluses” (SF 207). Although Faulkner clearly satirized his failure as the provider of the household and his manner of living with whiskey and classic readings, Mr. Compson is not a character endowed with no warmth of feeling towards his children. As many critics have acknowledged, Mr. Compson is a man of affection. To see Mr. Compson in this perspective demands we go back to Benjy’s monologue, which contains descriptions of Mr. Compson as a father in the childhood years of the children. He is the father who, in Benjy’s memory, would hold Benjy and Jason in his arms, stop the fights, talk to and come to say goodnight to the children (SF 15, 42, 46, 48). Mrs. Compson recognizes her husband’s kindness with the children, since she once complains that Caddy and Mr. Compson “humor him [Benjy] too much” (SF 41). In contrast to Mrs. Compson’s whimpering complaints and self-pity, Mr. Compson has shown some love and patience in responding to the inquiries and emotional needs of the children.
However, the affectionate father in Benjy’s section does not automatically transfer himself into Quentin’s section. What Quentin remembers is a sophisticated father dispensing advice, a father powerless at the conflicts between him and his wife, a father that sneers at the world and makes light of Quentin’s anxieties. In Quentin’s memory, Mr. Compson is shown in two aspects, a sustainer and a critic of tradition.

Mr. Compson’s impact is well reflected as Quentin wakes up on his last day with father’s words resonate and inescapable. Quentin remembers his father’s words in a succession. In the space of first five paragraphs, “father,” “father says,” and other variations like “he said” show up nine times. In the same concentrated intensity the last two paragraphs at the very end of Quentin’s section are populated with Mr. Compson’s ideas. Moreover, Quentin’s memory of his father in these parts is connected back to his grandfather. In the opening paragraph there is his grandfather’s watch, and near the end of Quentin’s section he remembers his grandfather being “always right” (SF111). Framing his memory within his father’s words, and the latter within the legacy of his grandfather, Quentin places both him and Mr. Compson within the family tradition, which shows an often neglected but essential image of Mr. Compson as a father passing on a tradition that he annihilates with conscious philosophical musings.
Despite Mr. Compson’s overt cynical nihilism, he still passes on to Quentin certain codes that he unconsciously follows. The first evidence is his giving Quentin the watch from his own father. Although what follows the gift is a speech on the universal folly of human experience, it must be acknowledged that in passing on the watch and giving counsel Mr. Compson unconsciously constructs for himself the status of father-as-authority in the family, something that he opposes to and rejects with his articulate nihilism. In fact, it is even possible to evaluate the overall interaction of Mr. Compson with Quentin from the perspective of a father giving counsel to his son, and draw the same conclusion that the father does not adequately fulfill his function as an authority. When Michael Millgate concluded that Mr. Compson fails “utterly in all his roles of progenitor, confessor and counselor” (Achievement of William Faulkner 95), he based his judgment on the same assumption that Mr. Compson works as a father figure in the tradition. While Mr. Compson seems to dismiss the pride of lineage and good family name with the idea that “any live man is better than any dead man but no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man” (65), he also takes pride in familiarizing Quentin with rambling narrations of a local legend. When Quentin becomes “a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts” (AA 12), he cannot have come to this simply from living near the
back-looking ghosts like Rosa Coldfield. Rather, it is safe to say that much of Quentin’s concern with family is unconsciously derived from his father. Another example of Mr. Compson’s passing on traditional values is found in his remarking on the manner of gentlemen that “it used to be a gentleman was known by his books; nowadays he is known by the ones he has not returned” (*SF* 51). True, Mr. Compson is ridiculing about the changing ideas, but beneath the sarcastic tone is indication of his awareness of the old gentleman code.

A stronger proof of Mr. Compson continuing to infuse Quentin with traditional codes amid his proclaimed aversion is revealed by his behavior towards his wife, Mrs. Compson and his daughter, which shows him not so much as a competent head of the family as a gentleman indulging women’s wishes. Facing his wife’s routine complaints and cries, Mr. Compson often acts as a pacifying husband, touching his wife’s face or saying he is just joking to restore peace (*SF* 28, 40). The reason he offers for not bothering about a woman’s complaints is fatalism coupled with good-natured indulgence: “Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts?” (*AA* 12). It is with the idea of gentlemen’s code that Mr. Compson explains in *Absalom, Absalom!* about Quentin’s duty to obey Rosa Coldfield:

“It’s because she will need someone to go with her—a man, a
gentleman, yet one still young enough to do what she wants, do it the way she wants it done. And she chose you because your grandfather was the nearest thing to a friend Sutpen ever had in this county, and she probably believes that Sutpen may have told your grandfather something about himself and her, about that engagement which did not engage, that troth which failed to plight. Might even have told your grandfather the reason why at the last she refused to marry him. –And that your grandfather might have told me and I might have told you. And so, in a sense, the affair, no matter what happens out there tonight, will still be in the family; the skeleton (if it be a skeleton) still in the closet. She may believe that if it hadn't been for your grandfather's friendship, Sutpen could never have got a foothold here, and that if he had not got that foothold, he could not have married Ellen. So maybe she considers you partly responsible through heredity for what happened to her and her family through him” (A4 12-13).

Observe Mr. Compson’s concept of gentleman and his way of linking the gentleman’s duty to the community and hereditary responsibility. In his interpretation of Rosa’s motives he invariably goes back to traditional ideas about community, family and individual, and thus prepares Quentin for a man’s responsibility in this context. In *The Sound and Fury*, Mr. Compson’s gentlemanly indulgence is made more explicit as Quentin remembers him saying “to go to harvard has been your mothers dream since you were born and no compson has ever disappointed a lady” (*SF* 113). Although this remark appears in Quentin’s simulated conversation with his father and may not be Mr. Compson’s actual words, it reflects nonetheless the success with which Mr. Compson has instilled the idea of gentleman into his son.

On Caddy’s affair, Mr. Compson’s response is remembered by Quentin to be different from her conventionally ambitious wife. Mr. Compson stops
his wife from inquiring into the matter upon Caddy coming back. Then when he learns that his wife has set Jason to spy on Caddy, he is enraged and voices his strongest disapproval “I wont have my daughter spied on...I will not have my daughter spied on by you or Quentin or anybody no matter what you think she has done” (SF 61). Viewed in the context of the southern codes for man, a gentleman is required to respect a woman, trusting and not embarrassing her even at times when he learns she does not do things right. A man is a gentleman because he adheres strictly to his code. That is why, in “A Rose for Emily”, Judge Stevens arranges a secret cleanup of Miss Emily’s premises to rid it of the bad smell reported by the complaining neighbors, since a gentleman cannot tell a lady to her face that she smells bad. Therefore, Mr. Compson’s decision to leave Caddy alone is compatible with his upbringing and his sense of a man’s honor. It is from Mr. Compson that Quentin learns the idea about a man’s duty and self-respect. Quentin’s thought that “Father and I protect women from one another from themselves our women” (SF 62) is an echo of Mr. Compson’s view of the man as superior and protector, which becomes a major cause of Quentin’s pain and suffering as he strives to prove himself worthy of this concept.

The image Mr. Compson poses for Quentin is not merely a sustainer of tradition. On a more articulated level he plays the critic of tradition, often
compounding the matter for Quentin. For example, Mr. Compson does not hide his denial of virginity and bias against women. He describes women as physically “delicate and mysterious,” naturally sexy and filthy “Delicate equilibrium of periodical filth between two moons balanced” (SF 81). Although Mr. Compson seems to favour the idea that virginity is an invented concept, it does not mean that he places women as true equals of men. On the contrary, he regards women as intellectually and morally inferior. He says that “women have no respect for each other for themselves” (SF 61), and “Women do have... an affinity for evil” (SF 67), the reason for this, according to Mr. Compson, is that “women...dont acquire knowledge of people we are for” (SF 62).

In the conversation he holds with Quentin after Caddy’s loss of virginity, Mr. Compson tells Quentin that “it was men invented virginity not women,” and “women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It’s nature is hurting you not Caddy” (SF50, 74), evidently trying to help remove Quentin from an obsession with the idea of virginity. The argument of Mr. Compson does have a ring of truth, yet it serves only to undermine Quentin’s sense of an external reality—a reality, in this context, means the Southern social system which is “anchored in a firm awareness of social responsibility and personal honor” (Young 13). By removing the other sex from the claim of responsibility and
honor, Mr. Compson not only demonstrates his misogyny but also shatters the firmness of tradition, deconstructing its cognitive and moral elements. Unfortunately, the traditional values are viewed by Quentin as a framework for existence itself. If Mrs. Compson brings about Quentin’s sense of an unreal reality with the eradication of his trust in one of the closest member in his life, Mr. Compson shakes loose the framework of reality with a negation of established principles of their culture.

Quentin is not unaware of the logic behind his father’s argument against virginity. For one thing, he is sensitive to others’ opinions and particularly attentive to Mr. Compson’s counsel. For another, he lives among the plantation families and their tales. As Brooks said, he “is fully conscious of its desuetude” (*First Encounters* 52). Quentin, too serious to be cynical like Mr. Compson, shows a recognition of his father’s rhetoric against virginity but at the same time rejects it with the statement “but to believe it doesn’t matter” (*SF* 50). Mr. Compson promptly counters Quentin’s disagreement, pointing out further that everything else will suffer the same fate: whatever one believes or does will not matter. The argument demonstrates a basic difference in the attitudes of Quentin and his father. While Mr. Compson has forsaken his life to the world of alcohol, Quentin is intent on “the will to power,” the persistent urge that drives him to “respond with an active strategy” for the external crisis (Baechler
Quentin cannot be assured by the denial of virginity, because in casting out the traditional codes framing the reality, Mr. Compson’s argument also denies the significance of human actions.

It is evident that Quentin is striving to resolve his problem as it relates to the reality, the people and his sense of selfhood. He persists in his efforts to contemplate over the talks with Mr. Compson, the behaviors of Caddy and others, in addition to the construction of a valid interpretation for the Sutpen legend. What marks Quentin out from the people around him is his adherence to a belief in man’s capability to achieve human dignity. With Mrs. Compson Quentin is not granted a chance, but when the chance comes for him to talk with his father in earnest and real seriousness, Mr. Compson renders himself more than inadequate in helping his son to construct a belief in himself and the world. Rather, he threatens Quentin with a helplessness and meaninglessness that Quentin tries to overcome in words and actions. Mr. Compson’s deconstruction of a meaningful reality is manifested most clearly in his talks with Quentin on time and human condition.

The concern with time has been argued, in the case of Quentin, to be one of his central problems. The opening paragraph of Quentin’s section immediately immerses him in time, a dimension of reality he constantly

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23 Their argument is mainly about Quentin’s obsession with the past, which renders time his enemy because he finds no way to bring back the lost past. The representative criticism includes: Jean-Paul Sartre, pp. 87-93; Jean Pouillon, pp. 79-86; Peter Swiggart, *The Art of Faulkner's Novels* pp. 90-94.
takes pains to escape but every time finds himself slipping unconsciously back into it. There are also abundant symbols in Quentin’s section to remind him and the reader of the inescapability of time: the sun, its rays and shadows, the clock, watches and the bell, twilight and dusk, the coming and going of the train, even the trout and the gull have been interpreted in this category. Amid all the real objects working on the symbolic level, Mr. Compson’s constant references to time and human powerlessness seems for Quentin both amazingly appropriate and painfully destructive.

For a man like Quentin to be concerned about his existence, one of the fundamental questions for him to handle pertains to finitude and human life. In other words, he must address the relationship between human finitude and the eternal (Giddens 48-49). It follows naturally that Quentin should devote so large a portion of his energy to the subject of time. He seems to be at war with it on the last day of his life. But, one may ask, what leads to his obvious aversion to clocks and watches—the measurement of time? The answer, I believe, could only be found in Quentin’s memory of Mr. Compson’s musings, which amounts to nothing but a repudiation of human endeavor in any form. Let me begin by quoting the most celebrated piece of Mr. Compson’s talk on time:

I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it’s rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better
than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools (SF48).

Instead of specifying the exact time and occasion on which he hears Mr. Compson lecture about time and human beings, Quentin presents his father's ideas in the context of his own activities and associations, establishing the image of a son at once making references to and trying to break away from the father. Quentin remembers his father's talk on “the mausoleum of all hope and desire” when waking up on his last day and realizing that he is “in time again, hearing the watch” (SF 48). He is apparently caught up in the middle of two opposing forces. On the one hand his mind resonates with “Father says” which pop out every now and then to give him advice. On the other hand he keeps questioning about whether his father is right or not. He thinks to himself: “Wonder. Go on and wonder” and maintains an imaginary debate to the end of his section (SF 49). Like their differences on virginity, the differences between father and son on time create real problems for Quentin as well.

But, is Mr. Compson merely talking about time here? Probably not. He makes mention of time because there is a temporal aspect to human lives. He is actually explaining about the human condition with relation to time, and the pessimism revealed in it is profound and disturbing. If Mr.
Compson calls the watch “the mausoleum of all hope and desire,” then this piece of talk can be called “the mausoleum of all human endeavors.” The rest of Mr. Compson’s talks on time work to elaborate on this very idea. In effect, Mr. Compson is trying to influence his son with a nihilistic principle. In face of time all human experiences and achievements are reduced to absurdity and zero, and any significant effort or success is only illusion for fools. So what Quentin receives from his father’s alluring rhetoric is not so much about time as about the sense of eternal futility in human struggles.

The consequence of such pessimism on Mr. Compson is a perennial retreat into the embrace of alcohol, from where he could sneer at and ridicule the world while waiting for his clock to stop so that time may “come to life” (SF 54). Mr. Compson has no trust for immortality in the Christian sense. Quentin remembers him saying “down the long and lonely light-rays you might see Jesus walking,” which strips Jesus of his divinity and makes him as vulnerable to time as man (SF 49). With this idea Mr. Compson mocks the Christian dimension of temporal infinity which has served as the reassuring link between human efforts and the prospect of eternality, turning time to be man’s misfortune. I have shown that Mr. Compson functions more as a critic on traditional code. Since religion and traditional values are the essential pivots of a society on which the individual build up their trust in external reality (Giddens 48),
Mr. Compson can find no meaning in time and human existence after casing away the two. No wonder he finds the existence empty and could only face his condition in drunken delusion.

Skepticism and alcohol are the means Mr. Compson employs to approach his problem, and it works for him, at least in assisting him find a balance in life and not to kill himself as Quentin does. But Quentin is too honest to follow his father’s footsteps. In his talk with Caddy, she reveals her knowledge: “Father will be dead in a year they say if he doesn’t stop drinking and he won’t stop he can’t stop since I since last summer” (SF 79). Her knowledge is shared with Quentin since he also understands the family strife and sees through the cloak of the father’s nihilistic cover. Mr. Compson is genuinely hurt by Caddy’s promiscuity despite his proclaimed skepticism about everything. So at best, Mr. Compson’s nihilism is a verbal response to address his agony, giving him all the more reason for remaining passive in a helpless world.

Quentin understands that the real causes behind his father’s drinking and cynicism come from the parental conflict and Caddy’s affair. Yet he can do little to help Mr. Compson because these are precisely what trouble him too. Besides, young and not independent of his father’s influence, he has to turn to his father for advice to cope with the very same problems. As Mr. Compson neither believes nor is capable of any initiative, all he can do
is offer an argument against virginity and human actions. And the result is that, in addition to be burdened with his original problems, Quentin finds compelled to maintain a counter argument to the end of his section. The argument, evolved around Quentin’s confession of incest, reflects the anxiety and urgency Quentin feels in striving to win his father’s approval.

Different from the father in Benjy’s memory, who is capable of small but loving gestures, the father as Quentin remembers is an advice giver, an authoritative figure. Viewed as such, Mr. Compson is expected to give not only advice but recognition. In his first expected role he prescribes no action because “victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools” (SF 48). In the second he is imagined by Quentin not to take the discussed issue seriously: “i think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm” (SF 112). If Mr. Compson fails in the first capacity, he also fails in offering Quentin any emotional gratification. As the previous analysis shows, Quentin is emotionally disturbed by Mr. Compson’s philosophy on time and man. He simply finds unable to shake it away from the moment he opens his eyes. What’s more, Mr. Compson denies the worth of Quentin’s ideas and actions with his nihilism. He alienates himself from Quentin in the posture of a “wise” scholar, dispensing teachings on woman’s nature and futility of human efforts. Withdrawing into his world of drinking and cynicism, Mr. Compson does not respond sympathetically to Quentin’s
needs. Beneath the appearance of kind gestures such as talks and giving a watch as present, Quentin finds a father basically indifferent to his plight and just as unapproachable as his mother. When Quentin, instead of going to Mr. Compson, only imagines the father-son conversation on incest, he is transmitting to the reader a signal about the problems of the father-son communication.

That the father-son communication fails to produce rewards on emotional and practical levels is foreshadowed in Benjy's section, which presents an episode about the state of their communication at its best. At the age of ten, Quentin comes home bruised from fighting a boy at school over the boy's threat to "put a frog" in his sister Caddy's desk. Mr. Compson kindly inquires his son about the matter and then puts the question to him: "where was he [the boy] going to get a frog in November," to which Quentin replies: "I don't know, sir" (SF 43). Mr. Compson's manner of directing Quentin to recognize the fault is affectionate, but it does no avail with Quentin, who is more concerned with the boy threatening Caddy and with him as the protecting brother. The problem with Mr. Compson is that at the point of Quentin not seeing his mistake, he drops the subject instead of pursuing it. The childhood talk reveals that at the best, their communication yields no practical result.

Later from Quentin's section, we learn that the same problems persist.
Quentin is still possessed by the sense of honor as a brother, and Mr. Compson’s habit of relinquishment shows up in his philosophy, heavy drinking and lastly, in the imagined debate in which Quentin understands his father well enough to have him remark that “every man is the arbiter of his own virtues but let no man prescribe for another man’s wellbeing” (*SF* 113). Thus the episode in Benjy’s section can be said to become the first hint of a series of unsuccessful interaction between the father and the son as Benjy’s monologue gives away to Quentin’s. In all the talks recalled by Quentin, the unavailability of practical solutions to the family troubles is always present. To make matters worse, Quentin’s feeling of emotional helplessness is gradually magnified as Mr. Compson denies him the emotional support.

Quentin’s on-going argument with his father on virginity and human existence deserves more attention in the light of others’ responses to the construction of an individual’s sense of self-worth and identity. Giddens pointed out that “the responses of the other are necessary to the sustaining of an ‘observable/accountable’ world” (52). In the discussion on Mrs. Compson’s responses to her children, we are already informed of how destructive her behaviour is for Quentin who wishes to possess a loving mother. Facing Mrs. Compson’s denial of him as her flesh and blood, the need to assert an emotional bond will only grow and find a replacement in
the other parental figure. So the importance of Mr. Compson as father is not merely about guidance, it is also about recognition and affirmation, which is linked to the sustaining of a stable world Quentin could identify with.

The lack of love or affirmation in Quentin is echoed in two imagined relationships in *Absalom, Absalom!*: Quentin’s imagination of Charles Bon’s mother in New Orleans might be taken as a reflection of Mrs. Compson: a loveless mother plotting with the lawyer for a revenge on the father, because she sees the marriage a mistake and harbors an intense hatred that would use her own son as a tool to achieve her aim. Likewise, the construction of Bon yearning for the recognition of his father Sutpen can be interpreted as mirroring Quentin’s longing to seek the assent from his own father. Hence on the emotional level, Quentin’s problem with Mr. Compson differs from his with Mrs. Compson: his mother offers no love, while his father offers no affirmation.

The tragic point about the father-son relationship is not merely Mr. Compson’s refusal to grant Quentin the emotional support. It is the fact that Quentin recognizes the relinquishment and refusal in his father’s philosophy about time and woman, so he does not even try to actualize his argument about incest as a possible solution to the family dishonor. Many critics, in their analyses of Mr. Compson, has made the mistake of taking
the incest argument as one actually happens, but it does not. Mr. Compson never explicitly condemns Quentin’s idea of incest and suicide, because he has never learned of Quentin’s plan. Thus the imagined dialogue on incest discloses Quentin’s awareness of the unbridgeable gap in the seemingly friendly father-son relationship. Quentin’s persistent struggle with the image of world-weary father in the longest imagined conversation at the end of his section is reminiscent of his crying for “Mother Mother” when he feels sharply the absence of maternal love. Quentin finds out that his dependence on paternal affection does little to give him a sense of direction or self-worth. His father has never sympathized with his concern on the actual problems. By depriving women of their cultural virtues and denying the existence of meaningful actions. Mr. Compson estranges Quentin in his feeling of helplessness with the threat of a meaningless universe and actions—the condition he tries to fight back but discovers to have come back full circle.

On the whole, I would conclude that Mr. Compson shares a great deal of responsibility for Quentin’s suicide. He is the one parent with whom Quentin could connect and apparently Quentin has taken his counsel very seriously. But Mr. Compson plays an ambivalent role in counseling his son. He is the carrier of tradition when passing on the family watch as a present—a clear sign of the acknowledgment of Quentin as a son and heir.
However, he plays the critic of the tradition when hollowing out the underlying values behind the watch so that Quentin’s effort to interact with him and to have this interaction affirmed for its own worth fails miserably. In depriving women of the moral aspect, denying traditional codes like virginity, emptying the significance of time and human efforts, Mr. Compson successfully poses himself as an “enemy” for Quentin to struggle against.

Therefore, Quentin faces frustrations on two levels: emotionally his agonies increase for turning to his father; intellectually he must find a way to resolve one more problem of his father’s annihilation of his search for meaning. To define such a situation as a deplorable one is no exaggeration for a sensitive youth who struggles to feel real by relating himself to his environment and the people in it.
Chapter IV  The Last Human Bond

With his sister Caddy, Quentin forms probably the most important relationship. The brother-sister pair has been consistently discussed and held to be a shaping power on Quentin’s life. A careful look at the existing body of criticism will reveal that the critics generally agree “the reason for Quentin’s suicide at the end of his section is related to his sister’s loss of virginity” (Bauer 70). It is within this understanding, however, that we see different theories emerge as to what is exactly in Caddy’s loss of virginity that is so devastating to Quentin. Many critics like Peter Swiggart believed Caddy’s loss of virginity, the symbol of family honor, deals the heaviest blow to Quentin, a man concerned with the traditional Southern code. Melvin Backman proposed the theory of Quentin’s despair in losing Caddy to another man through her promiscuity. Miller argued that death is Quentin’s effort to eternalize his exquisite pain out of change and decay. Brooks held the idea that Quentin’s suicide is a result of his inability to face his impotence in repudiating the southern honor. More recently, a research by Margaret D. Bauer offered a brilliant discussion by arguing that Quentin dies through the realization and shame of his “culpability regarding Caddy’s destruction” (71).

24 To name just a few of the representative studies, see Cleanth Brooks The Yoknapatawpha Country, p. 337, Melvin Backman, p. 23-27, Peter Swiggart, p. 90-94, and John Irwin, p. 10-16.
While recognizing the insight and strength of the previous criticism, I would like to add to the present research by introducing another possible answer, first proposing that it is with Caddy that Quentin experiences for the first and only time the possibility of a rewarding human relationship based on love, communication and willingness to understand. In the major flash-back scenes involving Caddy and Quentin on the night before her wedding, on the day of Caddy’s loss of virginity, and the talk after Quentin-Dalton confrontation, there is consistent and strong evidence that Caddy’s character, her position as sister and her awareness of suffering enables her to communicate with Quentin on a deeper level that none in the family is capable of. Caddy’s loss of virginity and her subsequent marriage, then, signals for Quentin the removal out of his life the only one that truly cares for and shares with his agony. Therefore the loss of Caddy, in abstract terms but more as a sympathetic human being, is in a large measure to account for the choice of suicide on Quentin’s part.

To look upon Caddy as a human being capable of love but frustrated by her circumstances serves as a key to understand the Quentin-Caddy relationship as it really is in the Compson story, because one pitfall facing the critics of literature is the tendency to turn the real human beings into abstract symbols, and in so doing, reduces the complex human nature into one-sided signification. For instance, while some critics attributed Christ
status to Benjy, Bauer regarded Caddy as a true Christ figure. Some other scholars believed that Quentin’s death results from the collapse of the Southern culture, but Brooks countered with his explanation that Quentin’s death is “not really occasioned by the breakup of the Old South so much as by the breakup of an American family wrecked by parental strife and lack of love” (*First Encounter* 59).

As I have pointed out, the problems seems to be that the criticism is prone to the same mistake that William Faulkner presented in his Nobel Prize speech: that “the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about...”25 To put into perspective the case of Quentin’s death and Quentin-Caddy relationship, we must bear in mind that they both are real and multi-facet human beings in the story. To stretch one side of a character too far into an abstraction is to delineate the full value of humanity. Therefore, my interpretation will be trying to find a middle-ground to the polarized views which regards Quentin’s suicide as either a concern for an abstract family honor or morbid projection of his own unfulfilled sexual desires.26

Sociologist Douglas outlined a “typical suicidal situation,” in which a
man is most prone to making suicide decisions:

The one clear case of a typical situation, very generally defined, which does lead at times to the imputation of suicidal intentions to an individual before he has himself initiated any suicidal actions or communications is that of sudden, great personal loss... (of money, job, reputation, loved one)... it is the loss of a loved one that seems most frequently to lead to such considerations... not simply sharp, painful loss, but also a loss that is all-engrossing, encompassing, or involved, because of an assumed high degree of *identification* of the bereaved with the dead (in common sense terms identification is spoken of as “being so much a part of each other,” “like one person,” “inseparable,” etc.) (328).

I would like to point out that the words used by Douglas to describe typical causes for suicide fit most perfectly in the condition of Quentin and Caddy. Notice his use of defining terms as “sudden, great personal loss,” “loss of a loved one” with whom the suicide-taker forms “an ... *identification*” to the degree of “being so much a part of each other and inseparable.” I believe Douglas’ view mirrors the human relationship more truthfully than some of the abstraction we get from reading the implications of the brother-sister relationship. Quentin’s suicide is ultimately bound up with his sister, but it is not so much of the virginity or masculinity issue as a reaction in despair to the last worthy relationship he holds.

This reading first of all supplies an alternative perspective on the character of Caddy that firmly establishes her as a human being and sees her more as a real life personality than an “empty signifier” as Andre Bleikasten envisioned (56). Over fifty years, a substantial body of research has been accomplished and in general, they tend to assess Caddy along
three lines of argument: as the “genesis point” of the novel, as the moral perspective, and as the psychological obsessions of Quentin. The first study finds Caddy to be the “dynamism” or “center of main action” that both technically dramatizes the events of the Compson family and thematically serves as a unifying force for the four sections of the novel.\textsuperscript{27} The second line of research is derived from the moral point of view and identifies Caddy as the only Compson child capable of love, and more importantly, as the young woman representing in Quentin’s mind the Southern concept of purity. Quentin’s obsessions are often discovered to be the urge of possessing his sister Caddy to the exclusion of all other men, which is, according to Irwin, a Freudian case of narcissism and a punishment of brother seducer upon brother avenger. By classifying Caddy into different functions and images, these studies do indeed reflect the idea of Caddy as “empty signifier, a name in itself void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning” (Bleikasten 56).

However, much of the criticism seems to have overlooked one essential fact regarding Caddy, that in the environment of the Compson family, she first exists as a real person, a young woman living with her anxieties and interacting emotionally with people around. As her growing sexuality weighs down on the household, Caddy responds just as much disturbed to the reactions of her family, incurring profound psychological

\textsuperscript{27} See Caddy Compson, pp. 22, 39, edited by Harold Bloom.
pain on her part. Caddy’s inner suffering manifests itself only in her talks with Quentin, revealing the establishment of semi-rapport between brother and sister. I would argue that despite the possible transformation of Caddy into abstract symbolisms because of her figure as “absence” in the narratives, Caddy stands foremost as a young woman who not only loves but is willing to understand what troubles his brother Quentin. On the other hand, Quentin also feels the same urge towards Caddy. It is a luck that such human ties could form out of brother and sister, and a misfortune to see it severed with Caddy marrying away.

That Caddy exists as a responsive human being in the Compson household is evidenced by the memory of all the three brothers. Caddy’s love and devotion is most evident in Benjy’s memory where Caddy has been suggested along with Dilsey as a surrogate mother figure to fill the lack of a mother role in the Compson children. But there are fundamental differences in the “mothering” qualities of the two. Dilsey, because of her age, remains a mother figure throughout, whereas Caddy’s surrogate mother image is not consistent. As a matter of fact, Caddy’s mothering qualities are largely established by Benjy’s section and naturally meet challenges when she is examined on terms of Quentin-Caddy or Jason-Caddy relationship. Obviously, Quentin views her more as a sister that needs his protection, a peer that he could quarrel or fight with. The
key to appreciate the characterization of Caddy then, is to restore her status as a compassionate young woman who offers the hope of human bond in her interaction with her surroundings. For example, Benjy, the idiot child forever trapped as a three-year-old, senses her in the most physical and sensual terms. He constantly equates Caddy’s presence with the smell of trees, refreshing and reassuring. This symbolic connection unlocks the basic secret in Benjy-Caddy relationship: that Caddy is wanted by Benjy for the simple gestures of kindness and readiness to involve him in the real world, for she is the only one in the family that senses more than the physical needs of Benjy. In addition to feeding, caressing, sleeping with Benjy, Caddy talks to him, giving loving directions, trying to decipher his grumbling, and allows Benjy to do things he can manage, like holding the letter for Mrs. Patterson. Just as a tree represents to Benjy a part of the physical world he loves and can form identification with, Caddy means to him the bridge to the human world and the one human connection he possesses.

Likewise, Quentin’s memory of Caddy demonstrates a certain emotional gratification as well as the intellectual understanding established between brother and sister. This does not mean, however, that their relationship is one without problems. Quentin’s urge to keep Caddy with him and Caddy’s repeated sexual adventures, complicated by the
pair’s constant quarrels and fights, discloses a far less than mature sibling relationship, a source of worries and pains for both. Nevertheless, what becomes more poignantly important for each of them is that they alone in the Compson family seem to sympathize with and partake in the emotional and intellectual life of the other. In their childhood, Caddy and Quentin both see a picture in one of their books “a dark place into which a single weak ray of light came slanting upon two faces lifted out of the shadow”, a dungeon Quentin imagines out of which his father and mother move “upward into weak light holding hands and us lost somewhere below even them without even a ray of light” (SF 109-110). This implication of the children being excluded is also taken up by the little Caddy because she declares “You know what I’d do if I were King?... I’d break that place open and drag them out and I’d whip them good” (SF 109). The mutual understanding of a family devoid of devotion carries into their adolescence and somehow makes them dependent on the other for understanding and support in life. Therefore, Caddy, on the night before her wedding, turns to Quentin for promises to take care of Benjy and Mr. Compson. It is to Quentin alone she confesses that “I cant even cry I died last year I told you I had but I didn't know then what I meant I didn't know what I was saying...but now I know I'm dead I tell you” (SF 78). In the meantime, Quentin shows true concern for Caddy’s wellbeing. He wants to know how
she is sick just before her wedding, and insists on her not marrying because she is running a fever. From their talks we learn that Quentin’s warning Caddy not to marry mirrors her confessions of emotional and spiritual stagnation; Caddy’s marriage then seems to confirm that by marrying “that blackguard...a liar and a scoundrel” (SF78), she suffers a greater loss of her whole being instead of mere maiden virtue.

As for the idea of virginity central on Quentin’s mind, Caddy is revealed to understand her brother’s dilemma better than their father Mr. Compson. Early in the section, the awareness of his own virginity disturbs Quentin’s sense of selfhood because “in the South you are ashamed of being virgins. Boys. Men. They lie about it” (SF50). When he witnesses Caddy transform before his eyes from virgin to non-virgin, Quentin turns to his father’s wisdom for an answer to his puzzles. Yet Mr. Compson provides his son neither moral guidance nor emotional support with a nihilistic remark “women are never virgins” (SF73-74). By contrast, when Quentin comes to Caddy pressing her with questions like “do you love him” or “did he make you then he made you do it” (SF95), Caddy senses the anxieties beneath his aggression and asks “youve never done that have you...that what I have what I did” (SF95). To this Quentin vehemently denies, just as a southern young man lies about his virginity, “yes yes lots of times with lots of girls” (SF96). Despite the blatant boasts,
Quentin could not hide his bewildered powerlessness behind the assertion and aggression of a knife, he collapses down crying while Caddy, feeling her brother’s pain and helplessness, quietly holds his head “against her damp breast” to let the emotional rage run its course (SF’95). A while later, Caddy meets Dalton, only to leave him behind to look for Quentin. The same scene is repeated a couple of days later when Caddy, terrified by the idea of Dalton hurting Quentin, comes to her brother after sending Dalton away for good. Caddy’s manner of treating Quentin and indulging with his wishes in the midst of her own turmoil bespeaks a sensitive and compassionate soul that harbors deep love for Quentin and places concern for the wellbeing of a brother before her own needs.

Even with Jason, the cold-hearted mercenary brother she never feels any allegiance to, Caddy shows as much humanity and is thus exposed to worse fate. While Benjy and Quentin want her for the gratification of the communicative dimension of human bond, Jason manipulates Caddy’s capacity for love to gain dominance and materialistic benefits. In Jason’s story, the first time Caddy appears is beside the grave of her father, where she tries to talk Jason into offering a brief visit with her daughter Quentin. The negotiations turn out to be a gradual process of the total annihilation of whatever human and responsive in her. Jason’s weapon of retribution is to subject Caddy to her conscience and love. He reminds Caddy from the
beginning of their talk that she is the cause for his loss of the promised job and there is nothing left in the family for her, making Caddy feeling guilty and realizing she must beg his help because there is no other way. After being tricked by Jason and not getting to see her daughter, Caddy comes to Jason to call him liar. However, this time she loses her initiative and shakes “like an ague-fit, her hands clenched and kind of jerking” (SF 129).

The next time Caddy appears, she is presented frozen “as still as a post” before the shameless threat from Jason, who says that if she tries again to see Quentin through Dilsey, their mother would “fire Dilsey and send Ben to Jackson and take Quentin and go away” (SF 130). Jason’s intimidations are quite effective because he cashes in on Caddy’s love and concerns for Benjy, for her daughter as well as for Dilsey. It is precisely the humanity in Caddy that makes her respond and fall prey to the threat.

Being stripped out of her defenses, Caddy suffers a further deterioration from practical deadlock into spiritual breakdown. Bauer, in her discussion of Quentin’s guilt for the misfortune of Caddy, has compared Caddy to a Christ figure. It is no doubt that “her selfless love and sacrificed life” makes her fate Christ like (Bauer 71), but I believe there is greater significance in the human dimension of Caddy. Jesus Christ never wavers in his love or in the cruelest moments of persecution. By contrast, Caddy is only human. Her love, initiatives and sympathetic
responses are gradually drained away by a series of events: her concession to marry Herbert, her brother’s and father’s deaths, her daughter being taken out of her life, and lastly, battling the harsh reality embodied in Jason. When she subjugates to Jason’s will with the relinquishment of her right to see her daughter as she is entitled to, the brother-sister relationship has been firmly grounded in business deals. Obviously in this field Caddy is no match for the shrewd calculator Jason. Knowing her brother a habitual liar, Caddy is naturally worried whether little Quentin is well provided for. But her wish to check the bank accounts to see where the money goes meets an outright rejection from Jason, who plays on her daughterly conscience not to disappoint Mrs. Compson. Afterwards, Caddy’s request to take back her daughter for a thousand dollars is again countered by Jason with accusations of her promiscuity. She almost breaks down and starts begging Jason for a little concern for his niece. Seeing Jason unmoved, Caddy goes hysterical and is convulsed with explosive laughter, like her brother Quentin’s bursting laughter on the day of his death, when they both realize that nothing they make to remedy matters will come to any avail. It is the last time we meet Caddy in the story. Afterwards her presence vanishes, taking away the remaining human sympathy in the Compson line.

The explanation of Caddy as the only one sympathetic, responsive
human being in the Compson family also helps to answer the question: what is exactly in the Quentin-Caddy relationship that is so devastating to Quentin? My reading of Caddy has established her as the only one who fulfills Quentin’s communicative needs. To lose Caddy is the equivalent of severing all human ties for Quentin. Yet Quentin’s problems do not end here. As a brother he naturally responds to the situation but finds himself running into more troubled state. We will learn that the responses of Quentin further illustrate the importance of the brother-sister relationship, and are indications of Quentin’s own humanity.

The loss of Caddy’s virtue presents a real problem to Quentin, in the sense that he views it as existential, one concerning “the whole of” his situation and at the same time “both internal and external.” This attitude is markedly different from the rest of his family, since none of them seem to be affected in the same manner like he does. Mr. Compson regards Caddy’s problem as merely a conceptually misconceived idea, the quicker one forgets virginity the better. Mrs. Compson and Jason consider Caddy’s case a worldly one that could be polished over with a respectable marriage. It is on the mid-point of the polarization that Quentin is caught, and finds himself the most anguish in struggling to deal with the situation as a young man who tries to understands but is wrecked by his sense of

28 This idea is taken from Jean Baechler’s *Suicides*, in which he defines the choice of suicide as a response to an existential problem, because “one does not kill oneself or an idea unless this idea focuses on one’s aspirations or conflicts.” For detailed explanation, see Baechler *Suicides* 11-13.
inadequacy.

When I proposed the idea at the beginning of this chapter that the loss of Caddy, in abstract terms but more as a sympathetic human being, is instrumental in approaching Quentin’s choice of suicide, I have in mind Quentin’s responses to two events related to Caddy, namely, Caddy’s loss of virginity and her subsequent marriage. As the loss of Caddy transfers from a conceptual loss of virginity to a physical loss, Quentin’s reactions undergo a reverse change, exhibiting a gradual retreat from real-life confrontations to imaginary fantasies.

Quentin’s futile attempts to redeem Caddy’s honor upon her loss of her virginity proves to be the boldest he ever takes in real life. In examining the possible ways to handle an existential problem, Baechler lays down five alternatives, of which the most violent is to kill, either the subject himself or any essential element involved in the situation.29 The intention and attempt to kill is the first response Quentin demonstrates. On the night of Caddy’s loss of virginity, Quentin follows her to the riverbank. There he vows revenge on Dalton “tomorrow I’ll kill him I swear I will” (SF 95). Then, upon realizing that Caddy has given herself to Dalton out of her free will and affection, Quentin takes out a knife and

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29 Baechler’s five ways to deal with an existential problem are summarized here briefly: 1) the subject modifies his desires for a satisfactory solution; 2) the subject cuts his ties to what is real and construct his own private reality; 3) the subject removes, either really or in fantasy, himself from the situation; 4) the subject removes other elements to gain an advantage, like killing the other one, which is a crime; 5) the subjects suppresses all data, like killing all involved. For detailed explanation, see Baechler Suicides, 14.
pushes it against Caddy’s throat, intending to kill both Caddy and himself, before his courage fails him and must be comforted by Caddy.

Quentin’s swift transfer—from vowing to kill Dalton, through attempting to commit a joint suicide, to a sudden breakdown in Caddy’s arms—presents an enigma to the reader. The criticism has so far offers no adequate answer to explain such abrupt changes of attitude in Quentin. His aborted suicide and later failed challenge to Dalton are viewed mostly as weak, feminine, and indicative of his inability to follow the masculine code. True comments as they are, they merely point to the abstract symbolism of the one act: killing/challenging fulfilled or not, leaving behind Quentin’s intention in initiating a series of responses, thus failing to explain why Quentin acts and argues in the manner as we see him.

The clue to the answer is to be found in the first dozen lines of the brother-sister conversation in the same riverbank scene. There Quentin repeatedly presses Caddy over the nature of her relationship with Dalton Ames, asking questions like “do you love him”, “did he make you then he made you do it”, “Caddy you hate him dont you” (SF95). Quentin seems to come under the furious illusion that the situation would be better-off if Caddy gave herself to Dalton under his threat because “he is stronger than you” (SF95). What will be the benefit in knowing Caddy’s feeling for Dalton?
The reason for Quentin’s obsession with Caddy’s feeling for Dalton should be that he is afraid of being separated from Caddy, who alone in his world offers him hopes of warmth and sympathy. Quentin imagines Caddy’s love would still be his if she does not love Dalton. It will also give him the excuse to get rid of Dalton and go away with Caddy, so she would always be his loving sister. To redeem Caddy’s honor, important as it is, comes secondary to the preservation of being together with Caddy. This is a point that will be elaborated further in the following argument, but as the first step I would like to point out that the thought of keeping Caddy with him and having her love obviously outweighs other alternatives, such as his desire for revenge on Dalton. As the narrative in this part shows, Quentin’s challenge to Dalton comes a few days after Caddy’s loss of virginity, but his aborted act of killing both Caddy and himself takes place on the very night of learning Caddy’s dishonor. The sequence of events shows the first action Quentin attempts is not to wash away Caddy’s dishonor with a masculine gesture of following the code of honor, but to keep Caddy and himself together by any means possible, including committing suicide or elopement, the latter he proposes to Caddy on the same riverbank, that they take Quentin’s school money and go where “nobody need ever know” (SF95).

The top priority in his life, Quentin’s urge to keep Caddy drives him
to try various ways in order to secure Caddy for him after she loses virginity. Attempting mutual suicide is the boldest step Quentin ever dares to take. Another initiative that parallels the courage of suicide comes a few days later when Quentin meets Dalton on the bridge, where Quentin gives the order “I’ll give you until sundown to leave town” (SF 101). Although the second boldest attempt of Quentin ends with his passing out like a girl, it is worth noticing that the two acts—killing one and challenging the other—are the most externalized, practical remedies of Quentin’s inner needs. By following a course of aggression against others, Quentin is adopting Mrs. Compson’s attitude, who believes the problem with Caddy is basically external, and by removing the external barriers the situation could be saved.

Consequently, the failure to accomplish his aggression does more than signal the weaker side of Quentin. It also points to Quentin’s awareness of a possible future with Caddy, for at this point he still claims the love and attention Caddy lavishes on him. On the riverbank scene and later on the bridge, events repeat themselves and consequences are reinforced, leaving Quentin with the knowledge that Caddy puts his wellbeing before Dalton. Caddy’s concern for her brother twice drags her from Dalton’s side to look for Quentin: with the quieter riverbank scene foreshadowing Caddy’s anger at Dalton over the safety of her brother in
the later bridge scene. In the riverbank episode Caddy repeatedly subjects herself to Quentin’s wishes, saying “yes I’ll do anything you want me to anything yes” (SF 99), even to the point of resigning her life to Quentin’s knife. Her willingness to follow Quentin’s will is magnified in the later bridge scene, in which under Quentin’s insistence, she gives up the chance to make up with Dalton for her mistake. Caddy’s willingness to indulge Quentin’s wishes demonstrates the extent of her sympathy for her brother, which must be felt by Quentin and becomes a great reassurance for his psyche. Examined in this perspective, Quentin’s aggressive acts resume a new meaning: frustrated, they nonetheless accomplish the ultimate purpose on his mind—to remove the external barriers in his relationship with Caddy. Therefore, in the midst of the infamous dishonor, Quentin still manages to keep his sister within his reach, emotionally supportive and physically close.

Quentin’s practical failure yet virtual success also helps to explain the timing of his suicide. The reader learns that Quentin commits suicide on June 2, 1910, nearly two month after Caddy’s wedding in April. If Quentin viewed the loss of Caddy’s honor so traumatic as to effect a death decision, why does he wait for more than ten months before he actually kills himself? Is there any point in postponing the final act for so long? From the critics, we learn that Caddy’s loss of virginity exerts three kinds
of possible impact on Quentin. First, it reminds him of his own virgin state, the loss of which is conventionally deemed essential for the attainment of Southern manhood and yet Quentin is unable to achieve. Then, the affair becomes a family shame that challenges his ability to redeem her honor. Lastly, it triggers Quentin’s fear of being separated from Caddy. As the argument of this study exhibits, the first two considerations are not central on Quentin’s mind. It is the last awareness that primarily motivates Quentin’s responses and logically explains the less-than-consistent gestures and fantasies of Quentin. After examining the nature of the brother-sister relationship and Quentin’s intention behind his aggression, I would conclude that the final blow to crush Quentin comes not from the virginity issue, but from Caddy’s marriage to Herbert.

Caddy’s marriage is foreshadowed earlier in Quentin’s section to symbolize death. On returning home for Caddy’s wedding, Quentin is met by his mother at the station. The meeting contrasts Mrs. Compson’s merry flatteries of Herbert with Quentin’s treatment of the wedding invitation. For three days the invitation lies unopened on the table of his Harvard room, “a candle burning at each corner upon the envelope tied in a soiled pink garter two artificial flowers” (SF 60). What Quentin does to the invitation is to treat it in the manner appropriate for a funeral, an
attitude dramatically opposed to Mrs. Compson’s high spirits. When she believes Caddy’s case has been handled to the most desirable solution, Quentin is the only one beside Caddy to feel the true degradation and shame. Therefore, unlike his urge in the virginity issue, Quentin no longer shows interest in reasons for Caddy’s marriage, and has come to look upon the marriage as virtual death.

Quentin’s feeling over Caddy’s wedding finds echo in Caddy’s confessions. On the night before her wedding, Caddy shows anything but happiness. She is sick, running a fever and feels bad. Brushing aside Quentin’s warning that Herbert is no good match, Caddy insists “I’ve got to marry somebody” (SF 72). The way she repeatedly begs Quentin to look after Mr. Compson and Benjy resembles a dying man desperately eliciting the last promise “I’m sick you’ll have to promise”, “I’m just sick I cant ask anybody yet promise you will” (SF 71). Obtaining Quentin’s promise, Caddy then pours out her deepest agony to him “I cant even cry I did last year I told you I had but I didn’t know then what I meant I didn’t know what I was saying ...But now I know I’m dead I tell you” (SF 78). The reason behind her misery is not only to enter a loveless marriage because she is “got to marry somebody” but also for her to see the dissolution of what she has held dear “Father will be dead in a year they say if he doesn’t stop drinking and he wont stop he cant stop since I since last summer and
then they’ll send Benjy to Jackson I cant cry I cant even cry” (SF73, 79).

The confessions of Caddy reveal a tortured soul that finds only emptiness and suffocation in a conventionally celebrated marriage. This is the truth Quentin learns by means of intuition and foretells with decorating the wedding invitation like a coffin. Since none in the family except Quentin can approach Caddy intellectually, he is the only one to sense Caddy’s grief and insists on her not marrying Herbert. On Caddy-Dalton relationship, Quentin never questions Dalton’s character; what he wants to know concerns love itself. For the sake of Caddy’s virtue, Quentin attempts to challenge Dalton like a man. But with Herbert he is the one being challenged.\(^\text{30}\) The contrasts of the two circumstances point to a fall from human plane to expediency, and the expedient marriage is reducing Caddy to despair. Hence, Caddy’s response to Quentin’s warning befits one that has relinquished hopes on life and is overwhelmed by the irrevocable breakup of her family. When Caddy realizes she is dying with the impending wedding and marrying away, what would become of Quentin, who has for so long counted on Caddy’s love and sympathy, and whose knowledge tells him the marriage between his loving sister and hypocritical Herbert would be a sure disaster?

\(^{30}\) Near the end of Herbert’s rattle at Quentin, Herbert grows impatient because Quentin never grants him recognition as brother-in-law, nor promises to keep his bad record a secret from Caddy. So he challenges Quentin by saying “look here take a look at me how long do you think you’d last with me” (SF69), but a sleek businessman, he quickly abandons the idea and resorts back to boasting and flattery.
Caddy’s wedding envelopes Quentin in the same forbidding anguish, both physically and emotionally. In addition to showing an awareness of the spiritual deprivation with the decorating of the wedding invitation, Quentin’s memory juxtaposes his sister’s insistence on marrying Herbert with two other episodes: the twice breaking of Quentin’s leg and a talk over Louis’ lantern. The former is an incident that probably happens in Quentin’s teens and the latter might have happened even earlier in his life. Nevertheless, both events carry for Quentin a sense of repetition of experiences as well as of looming disaster. The first memory about “the bone would have to be broken again” is triggered on by Caddy’s words “I’ve got to marry somebody” (SF 72). The re-breaking of Quentin’s leg undoubtedly signals the experience of twice-inflicted pain, which serves as a key to understanding the extent of his agony about Caddy’s wedding. It is worth noting that the re-breaking of the leg comes at a time when the broken leg is about to heal, so to feel the injury once more with full consciousness suggests the pain Quentin feels towards his sister’s marrying away:

I’ve got to marry somebody. Then they told me the bone would have to be broken again
told me the bone would have to be broken again and inside me it began to say Ah Ah Ah and I began to sweat. What do I care I know what a broken leg is all it is it wont be anything I’ll just have to stay in the house a little longer that’s all and my jaw-muscles getting numb and my mouth saying Wait Wait just a minute through the sweat ah ah ah behind my teeth...Wait I’ll get used to it in a minute wait just a minute I’ll get... (SF 72)
Similar to Caddy's effort at making light of her physical and mental affliction, Quentin tries to minimize his injury, pretending a broken leg or Caddy's marriage is "all it is it wont be anything...I'll get used to it in a minute." But again like Caddy's case, his suffering surfaces despite all his pretensions, making him sweat and his "jaw-muscles getting numb and...saying Wait Wait just a minute through the sweat."

Due to the agony in this piece of memory, the leg-breaking episode is cut short right here, as abruptly as Quentin has cut short remembering Caddy's decision to marry. He then drifts to another occasion earlier in his life, a lighter one at first look, but one that actually bears more weight on Quentin's vision of life. In his talk with Louis Quentin learns that Louis never cleans his lantern except on occasions of a flood, and that he has twice saved his life because he has cleaned the lantern twice. The talk describes a way to cope with disasters mysterious to Quentin, yet he must have seen its success: by cleaning the lantern Louis escapes the floods. The fact that Quentin cannot help remembering this incomprehensible survival instinct indicates the awareness of his own failure. While Louis survives by a simple recipe, Quentin is about to see his life wrecked the second time. Like the great flood that devours lives, Caddy's marriage devastates both brother and sister, leaving Quentin with no resources to turn.
On the occasion of Caddy’s wedding, Quentin discovers not only his sister’s misery, but also a fear that he is losing Caddy, physically separated and losing her indulgence and love. Herself a tormented bride, the Caddy at the time of the wedding drastically differs from the quiet Caddy ten months ago. In Caddy-Dalton relationship Quentin has relied on Caddy’s indulgence to play the role of inquisitor, whereas on the occasion of wedding it is Caddy who tries Quentin’s patience. She is cross at Quentin for meddling in her business, refuses to answer his concern about her health, and presses him for promises he has no intention to keep. She brushes aside her brother’s genuine worries over the character of her would-be-husband and determined to follow a road that she knows means her virtual death.

At this point Quentin is equally disturbed, his former boldness giving way to verbal protests. There are two causes for this. For one thing, his knowledge of Herbert has not made the latter a worthy opponent. For another, Caddy’s determination to marry casts Quentin out of her world, leaving very little room for him to occupy. If Quentin has attempted chivalric valor in driving Dalton away, Caddy’s desperate insistence offers him no such illusions on the marriage issue. The best Quentin could do is to try vainly to talk Caddy out of her decision, proposing a possible solution that they go away with Benjy. But this proposal is again rejected
by the guilt-ridden Caddy as she reminds Quentin “on what on your school
money the money they sold the pasture for so you could go to Harvard
dont you see you’ve got to finish now if you dont finish he’ll have nothing”
(SF 79). Therefore, the responsibilities heaped on their shoulders have
blocked the last possible alternative Quentin could think of to handle the
practical deadlock.

Quentin is powerless against losing his sister, first her loss of virginity,
and then her marriage turning his fear into actuality. As his last attempt
at maintaining the tie with Caddy is frustrated, he retreats further into
his private realm. The meeting with the little Italian girl illustrates one of
Quentin’s fantasies in relation to Caddy. Small, mute and lost, the girl is
felt by Quentin to share a kinship with his own sister. He calls her “sister”
and places in the little girl his unfulfilled wishes of offering a brother’s
protection. Yet the irony is the Italian girl never answers his protection,
just as Caddy never wants it. When the girl’s brother intercepts them and
accuses him of child molesting, the irony is complete. Quentin finds
himself shaking with laughter. He has failed in bringing out actual
changes to the despairing condition at his own home, now he fails once
more to impart some sympathy and help even in his fantasy.

One last imaginary means for Quentin to bridge the rift between him
and Caddy is the incest excuse he constructs. When Quentin on his last
day remembers the vision of incest, he seeks refuge in it because this crime has the power to bond him to Caddy, in a manner that they never be separated:

\[
\text{we did how can you not know it if youll just wait Ill tell you how it was it was a crime we did a terrible crime it cannot be hid you think it can but wait...and Ill tell you how it was Ill tell Father then itll have to be because you love Father then well have go to away amid the pointing and the horror the clean flame Ill make you say we did Im stronger than you Ill make you know we did you thought it was them but it was me listen I fooled you all the time... (SF94)}
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The ultimate aim of incest, as Quentin reveals here, is to “go away” with Caddy. As long as he holds on to this one connection in life, he feels somewhat assured and does not mind ending up amid the flames of hell “Only you and me then amid the pointing and the horror walled by the clean flame” (SF 74). In Quentin’s fantasy, the idea of incest and hell sustains life and love because of “the clean flame the two of us more than dead” (SF74), hence preferable to surviving in a cold reality devoid of any human attachment. But the incest excuse could not offer a psychological haven for long. Soon in his imagined conversations with Mr. Compson, Quentin knows his cynical father would mercilessly smash his dream and drag him out to see “there is nothing else in the world” (SF113).

Quentin is not convinced by his father and could not bring himself to see the nihilistic nature of the world and human existence. He has longed to be on the side of his sister Caddy, as much as Benjy the idiot child. Both of the brothers know, through intuition and intellectual perception, that
Caddy is the lone one to offer any human comfort and understanding. True as Melvin Backman’s comment that Quentin’s obsession “with his sister’s chastity derives largely...from a personal rather than a cultural situation” (27), it should not stop the reader from learning that Quentin’s obsessions also point to the dimension of all humanity—the call for “love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice,” the lacking of which, according to Faulkner, “any story is ephemeral and doomed,” 31 and without it man is doomed as well. This brings us to the understanding that why Quentin does not kill himself at the time of Caddy losing virginity, but plunges to death after Caddy marries. With Caddy, Quentin can endure. When the only light goes out of his life, he chooses to obliterate himself, for there is nothing human that he wants to keep.

31 Faulkner’s speech in Meriwether’s edited book Essays, Speeches and Public Letters by William Faulkner, 120.
When Faulkner wrote Quentin into *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, the tragedy he presented is so poignantly gloomy, and the modernist technique he employed so daringly impressive that the critical world continued for a long time to regard him as an author of tragic stories. Despite the fact that Faulkner’s works after *Absalom, Absalom!* reveal a gradual lifting of the mood of despair, the persistence to favor his modernist tragic model lingers on (MacMillan 9-11).

But the visible change that came over Faulkner’s later novels do merit our attention, because it presents an alternative exploration regarding the sociological argument of a correlation existing between human destiny and the circumstances one finds himself in. Therefore in this last chapter I will attempt to carry my research a step further, by briefly discussing three more boy heroes’ *Bildungsroman* under the influence of community elders because they form a contrast to Quentin’s circumstances and highlight the inevitability of the latter’s fall.

The three heroes selected in the chapter are: Ike McCaslin from *Go Down, Moses*, Chick Malison from *Intruder in the Dust*, and finally, Lucius Priest of *The Reivers*. I select the three on the principle of age, gender and their roles in the novel. All four of them belong to the boy hero
type and are descended from established white households. Like Quentin, they play the central narrator, or the central consciousness. But unlike Quentin, they are the survivors. None of them are crushed physically as Quentin allows himself to be. Moreover, each of them manages to find a bearing on life that sustains his unity of selfhood and enables him to function as a social man. Ike McCaslin finds his spiritual redemption in being a hunter and becomes “uncle to half a country” (GDM 5). Chick Mallison crosses the racial barrier to save the life of a black man Lucas Beauchamp, a courageous act that contrasts with the prejudice of the white community. Lucius Priest, then, proves himself a boy of virtue by protecting Corrie and fulfilling his responsibilities in the delayed horse races.

When tracing these “lucky” characters and survival stories, Faulkner made it clear that their blessed destines are shaped under positive influences from the heroes’ family or community members. In a word, Faulkner did not overrule the sociological discovery about ordinary boys’ social conditioning and the overall human condition. I will demonstrate, in the following part, that each of these boys is ushered by increasingly benevolent forces into a more active existence.
1. Ike McCaslin

Ike McCaslin, the central character, narrator and moral consciousness in *Go Down, Moses*, is instructed by Sam Fathers from an early age. Ike is the male heir of the McCaslin family, the position equivalent to Quentin’s in the Compsons. Unlike Quentin who gains no good guidance from his parents, the orphaned Ike has identified himself with Sam Fathers, the part Indian, part black, part white who becomes his “mentor” (*GDM* 199).

“The Bear” opens with descriptions of Ike’s childhood longings for the big woods. There Sam seems to be placed in the story by Faulkner to answer the boy’s call and reassure him that he would only have to wait, to be “a hunter...a man” (*GDM* 167).

Ike’s bond to Sam is visible throughout “The Old People” and “The Bear”. At the age of seven Ike is trained in backyard hunting game with “rabbits and squirrels” (*GDM* 199). All his hunting urge finds inspiration in Sam who taught the boy the woods, to hunt, when to shoot and when not to shoot, when to kill and when not to kill, and better, what to do with it afterward. Then he would talk to the boy, the two of them sitting beneath the close fierce stars on the summer hilltop while they waited for the hounds to bring the fox back within hearing, or beside a fire in the November or December woods while the dogs worked out a coon’s trial along the creek, or fireless in the pitch dark and heavy dew of April mornings while they squatted beneath a turkey-roost (*GDM* 162).

One would notice this talk between Ike and Sam is reminiscent of the talks between Rosa and Quentin, Mr. Compson and Quentin in *Absalom,*
Absalom!. The differences here seem to be of higher frequency as noted by the season markers “summer,” “November or December,” and “April.” Most importantly, the talks of Rosa and Mr. Compson fail to convince Quentin of their credibility. There is no mutual rapport established among the narrators. Each is alienated in his or her own way. But with Sam and Ike, communication becomes natural. The close intimacy between the old wise hunter and the eager young listener nourishes the wilderness code in Ike, a code that he not only adheres to in hunting but transplants into his social role.

So Ike in reminiscence calls Sam his mentor and the wilderness “his college” (GDM 199). The old verities like humility, patience, Ike learns through his initial experiences with hunting. The first time he is taken out by Sam and the hunting party to the woods, Ike feels like “witnessing his own birth” (GDM 185). Though a boy, he serves as a member in the camp, helping with camping work, eating the coarse food, waiting on his stand with Sam. They are not important roles, just as the poorest stand he is assigned to watch for the game. Nonetheless, it is the beginning of his life in the hunting group. Ike is aware of this important and humble start. He has even “expected that.” He has learnt “humility” and is ready to learn “patience” in waiting for his first kill (GDM 186).

What we see in Ike forms an interesting contrast with Quentin’s
character and condition. Both of them are sensitive youth. Quentin is thrust into the chaotic family and community life with no adequate regulation exercised over him, whereas Ike has an elder to lead him in. The story has given Ike a clear boyish ambition and prepares him for proper training. Having practical expectations of his role in the hunting party, Ike the boy starts out well and learns to fit himself into the community he is at ease with throughout his life.

In addition to performing his humble role in the camp, Ike goes through other important experiences before he can make his first kill: witnessing courage, learning his own “fragility and impotence,” taking steps to overcome “doubt and dread” in facing a legendary bear of the big woods (GDM 190). This process of character building is accomplished through Ike’s awareness and act of relinquishment, of embracing the wilderness by removing from him the tint of civilization.

Ike learns man’s impotence and fragility in front of the wilderness. When the dogs come back after chasing Old Ben, they “huddled back under the kitchen…the eyes rolling and luminous, vanishing,” and there is something in the dogs that Ike cannot make out, “something more than dog, stronger than dog and not just animal, just beast even” (GDM 188). Only in another hunting season does Ike suddenly realize what he has sensed previously in the dogs: “an eagerness, passive; an abjectness, a
sense of his own fragility and impotence against the timeless woods, yet
without doubt or dread”, and Ike knows it is “in him too” (GDM 190). Ike’s
epiphany comes after his experiencing the same thrill and passive
helplessness when his intuitive knowledge is confirmed by Sam that Old
Ben has actually come down very close to watch him (GDM 190-92).

But at the time of Ike recognizing “fear as a boy, a youth” (GDM 193),
he witnesses as well the first sign of courage in one of the hounds, in her
“tattered ear and raked shoulder” (GDM 188). She is the last hound to
hold ground with Old Ben and come back bruised from the chase. Sam
recognizes courage in the dog’s lone fight immediately and compares it to a
man’s valor:

“Just like folks. Put off as long as she could having to be brave,
knowing all the time that sooner or later she would have to be brave
once so she could keep on calling herself a dog, and knowing
beforehand what was going to happen when she done it” (GDM 188).

The acquired knowledge of both fear and courage, coupled with an
understanding of his fragility in the wilderness, propels Ike to seek and
face his impotence as a novice hunter. Ike decides to face Old Ben. He
thinks to himself “I will have to see him” and heads into the woods on his
own, without even telling Sam his intentions (GDM 193). When Ike
returns from his first adventure fruitless, Sam quietly tells him: “You aint
looked right yet” (GDM 195).

There Ike is once more instructed by Sam, who has a mysterious
connection with the woods and seems to possess knowledge above human understanding. Bearing Sam’s words in mind, Ike makes a choice for the code, a choice for the “right”. He enters the forest once more, leaving “the gun by his own will and relinquishment...because of his need, in humility and peace and without regret” (GDM 196-197). The word relinquishment emerges several times in “The Bear,” signaling the degree of integration that Ike is able to achieve in the wilderness, a community outside his immediate social environment. The gun being the first object he relinquishes, next comes the watch, the compass and the stick, until Ike is completely stripped of human armor.

The “right” condition finally arrives that Ike could feel losing himself in serenity, yet be dynamic and observant enough to discover and meet Old Ben face to face. This solitary, inspirational journey teaches Ike that only a better self can be received into the wild. To accomplish that, he must forfeit “all the ancient rules and balances of hunter and hunted” (GDM 196). As Sam instructs him “to choose” (GDM 195), Ike chooses for the “right.”

The moral principle: choosing the right and sticking to it, is established in Ike before he turns a brilliant hunter. Two years later, Ike is imbued with the same idea once more. When he successfully secures his first kill of a wild buck, Sam directs Ike to slay the animal with “the
nearest approach...to dignity and decency” (*Faulkner in the University* 54). To Ike’s nephew McCaslin’s question, “Did he do all right?” Sam affirms, “He done all right” (GDM 156).

So Ike receives the consecrating blood that pronounces his social role as a hunter. His lessons do not end here, however, because in following the right rituals, Ike accepts “humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too... the hands...joining him and the man forever” (GDM 157). The white boy is bound to the mixed-blood old man in a spiritual, almost religious manner, forging a community transcending racial divisions. From Sam Ike not only learns proper hunting skills, but more importantly, of old verities like courage and pity, honor and humility, so that in listening to the old man he feels his future role as a master of the land is actually...trivial and without reality as the now faded and archaic script in the chancery book in Jefferson which allocated it to them and that it was he, the boy, who was the guest here and Sam Father’s voice the mouthpiece of the host (GDM 163).

Character building in hunting and a reverence for the land and its peoples become the basis on which Ike constructs his understanding of a worthy human relationship. By contrast, this training and discipline under a wise elder, as well as an eagerness to attain knowledge and virtue, has never appeared in Quentin’s life. The elders Quentin comes into contact with are all beset by anger, cynicism and self-pity so that Quentin inherits more of their world-weariness than sympathetic understanding.
Quentin himself shows no interest in obtaining an education from elsewhere and says he goes to Harvard “because Harvard is such a fine sound forty acres is no high price for a fine sound. A fine dead sound we will swap Benjy’s pasture for a fine dead sound” (SF110).

Such different experiences at a hero’s young age lead to, as we can see, widely differently lives. While Quentin forsakes a weary life, Ike survives to be “uncle to half a country” (GDM5). In talking to the Virginia students, Faulkner confirmed Ike’s learning from life and said it “stood him in good stead throughout his life...gave him serenity...gave him what would pass for wisdom” (Faulkner in the University 54). Because Ike is deeply aware “there is only one truth and it covers all things that touch the heart” (GDM 246), he can recognize sin as it is and is able to confront it, removing himself from an endless cycle of crimes against fellow human beings.

Therefore, Ike grows up to become Uncle Ike as the country knows him. A carpenter, he works with his bare hands and gets married as other young men do. But his insistence on relinquishment of his birthright unfortunately causes the split between him and his wife. Their virtual separation leaves Ike childless. In a sense, Ike’s fate is still “tragic.” He knows no face of his father yet has to bear all the weight of family sin. His ideal of brotherly possession finds no echoing voice in his contemporaries;
and it even ruins his married life.

Ike’s repudiation of the family inheritance has been both faulted and praised by contrary views of the critics. Critics who support Ike’s decision generally agreed on his unusual frankness and courage to face the McCaslin history, praised his ideal of racial fraternity and recognized the need to free oneself before freeing others. The other camp who faults Ike’s behavior finds his act inadequate to the practical situation and thus guilty of washing his conscience clean with the repudiation of land and money.\footnote{For a comprehensive study of critical opinions regarding the effectiveness of Ike’s argument and decision on the MaCaslin’s property, see Hugh Short, pp. 86-94.}

The critics who find fault with Ike’s choice are mostly concerned with the effectiveness of the repudiation. Towards the end of his life in “Delta Autumn,” Ike remains a respected, but solitary hunter and uncle. His decision of repudiation seems to have saved no others. Rather, Faulkner deliberately put the reader into evaluating the validity of Ike’s relinquishment out of a pure heart. “Delta Autumn” arranges the meeting of Ike and a young, unnamed woman who comes to seek Roth Edmonds, for whom she has born a son. It shocks Ike to learn that she is not only part black, but also the granddaughter of James Beauchamp, thus by blood related to Roth and himself. Faulkner had the young woman accuse Ike, because he has “spoiled” Roth, by giving to “his grandfather that land which didn’t belong to him” (\textit{GDM} 342). The next story and also the last
one, “Go Down, Moses,” tells of Mollie Beauchamp’s stubbornness in bringing her dead grandson home. Her repeated chant “Roth Edmonds sold him” arouses little attention and is ignored (GDM 353). The memory of the ancient McCaslin sin of incest, miscegenation, and above all, possessive desire, is revived and disturbs Ike tremendously. The novel ends on a dark tone.

Apparently, the criticism of Ike’s behavior has its ring of truth. The last stories reveal that Ike’s sacrifice for a higher virtue has not born immediate, positive influence in the McCaslin situation, nor does it help with the needs of blacks on the plantation. But as Ike’s experience in the woods and reflection of the family history reveal, the “whole land….is curse,” cursed by the desire to possess, “that rank stink of baseless and imbecile delusion, that boundless rapacity and folly” (GDM 265). The depletion of wilderness has led Ike to see how human greed can destroy the naturalness of the land, lead to a possessive desire and manipulation that he witnesses in the family's treatment of the Negro. Despite the most "practical" argument about Ike’s possible management of the McCaslin property for the common good, the context of Go Down, Moses gives repeated evidence of how a man can fail, black and white included, in his conscience once he succumbs to the possessive urge that turns others into exploration.
In creating the characters with full flesh and blood, Faulkner did not drift away from sociological findings about human condition. Durkheim pointed out that, on the one hand, “as we feel detached from society we become detached from...life”; on the other, this problem does not exist for “the believer firm in his faith or the man strongly bound by ties of domestic or political society” (212). Quentin is placed in a worse social environment where he becomes detached from society. No interpersonal ties soothe his pain. No belief binds him to any established faith or code. He is the truly alienated average individual, living among walls that bounce back all his endeavors for meaning. That he becomes finally “detached from life” is only a natural product of his circumstances.

The end product of Go Down, Moses, however, is an Ike McCaslin who is a little better-off than Quentin in The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! While Quentin is devastated by family relationships at the age of twenty, Ike survives the McCaslin crime and his own failed marriage. Quentin agonizes over his discovery of the community history, whereas Ike takes uncompromising steps to ensure him no longer part of the continuing injustice. Ike, a solitary member on the edge of the white community, nonetheless earns the respect, if not understanding, of his fellowmen. He is better integrated into his time and race, bound by spiritual and domestic ties to his mentor Sam Fathers, nephew and friend.
Cass McCaslin and the boys growing up to learn hunting properly.

The contrasts of Ike and Quentin demonstrate that Faulkner’s works not only took “ordinary experiences as its central subject” (Olsen 3), but succeeded in matching an individual’s destiny with his degree of integration into society (Durkheim 210). My argument is that Faulkner offered Ike both a faith in higher values and an idea of his role that aroused in him “the sentiments of sympathy and solidarity,” drawing him towards others, Sam in particular (Durkheim 212). Quentin has never been fortunate enough to obtain any.

With Ike taking the lead of boy characters in Faulkner’s later canon, other boy heroes gained gradually better placement in their respective contexts. One important Faulknerian development of social integration is the emergence of more positive influences to compete against the depravation felt by the central character. In Go Down, Moses, Ike is bound to Sam only. Intruder in the Dust puts Chick Mallison under the impact of two role models: Lucas Beauchamp and Gavin Stevens. The Reivers offers an array of ordinary but good-hearted folks, in the Priest family and on the road: Boss, Allison, Ned, Miss Reba, Corrie, Mr. Parsham and Mr. Poleymus, thus the Lucius who is best equipped to face human complexities, and most removed from the tragic overtone of life.
2. Chick Mallison

*Intruder in the Dust* was published in 1948, six years after the celebrated book *Go Down, Moses*. Though it sold better than any of his previous works, it did not regain the literary status of such novels as *Go Down, Moses, Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*. Critically, Faulkner entered into a very different phase of realism with *Intruder in the Dust*, a phase less favored and discussed. Regarding his literary ideas and efforts, Faulkner said in his lectures that he “already knows what it is” (*Faulkner in the University* 90).

What is it that gives and sustains Faulkner’s faith in the twenty years after the publication of *The Sound and the Fury*? It seems that Faulkner had been intent on bringing into full scope another boy character like Quentin, Chick Mallison, a young descendant of a well-established white family. Through Chick, Faulkner traced the growth of a boy who feels agonized by his racial heritage like Quentin and Ike, acts with his choice and free will and finally is reconciled to his community.

Chick Mallison’s problem as he confronts in the story has lingered in the consciousness of other sensitive boy heroes: a choice between loyalty to his heritage, “the blood” or to “the truth of the heart.” Ike is lectured by his nephew Cass McCaslin to remain true to his blood, but he eventually breaks away from his family. Quentin feels this split likewise and, unable
to remove him from either, he is cornered and doomed. As for Chick, he is brought up to think in the traditional code of the South. One needs only to look at *The Town* to feel how strongly Chick identifies himself with his heritage. In this story which has Chick as one of the central narrators, Chick becomes the spokesman for the town of Jefferson by sticking to “we” and “us”: “when I say ‘we’ and ‘we thought’ what I mean is Jefferson and what Jefferson thought” (*T* 3). As a member of the white society, he has not questioned about the injustice of black servitude, until his encounter with Lucas Beauchamp changes his view profoundly and prepares him for a different vision of life.

Lucas Beauchamp’s first appearance to Chick is of a composed, dignified image. The terms like “composed” and “calm” emerge at least half a dozen times in the first three chapters. Chick is only a 12-year-old boy, and has just accidentally fallen into the creek. The loss of “face” annoys Chick, because it should be “something a girl might have been expected and even excused for doing but nobody else” (*ID* 7). Lucas happens to be at the scene and directs Chick’s black companion to rescue him. Chick’s shivering helplessness sharply contrasts with Lucas’ composure, which becomes psychologically humiliating to Chick as his initial urge to save “face” is strengthened by his attempt to assert his racial superiority.

In the first chapter, Faulkner impressively painted the polarizing

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33 In the first three chapters, “composed” appear three times; calm four times.
conflicts in Chick’s approach towards Lucas. Chick has been brought up too well, like standing by the door when his grandfather Judge Stevens goes out, and waiting for his family to leave the room (T40). On the most instinctive level, Chick responds naturally to the admired authority in Lucas, just as he obeys and respects his own grandfather. He knows with his heart that Lucas treats him as an old man would do with any ordinary boy. Chick recognizes the expression on Lucas’s face is “not black nor white either, not arrogant at all and not even scornful” (ID 11). The calm directions and orders are all given with no consideration other than his young age because Lucas simply cannot conceive “himself by a child contradicted and defied,” just as Chick “could no more imagine himself contradicting the man…than he could his grandfather” (ID 6).

Out of the need for love and reassurance, Chick is drawn towards the hospitality of Lucas’ family. Faulkner described Chick huddling himself under the warm cover of a quilt and remembering the familiar smell of Negro household which he has enjoyed and taken for granted as a boy. Chick could not envision “an existence from which the odor would be missing to return no more” (ID 10).

But on the ideological level, the code of the South comes creeping into Chick’s consciousness, reminding him time and again that they are not only different, but he is supposed to be the superior. Drawing a line
between them, Chick's first attempt is to repeat the request several times of going back to Roth Edmonds' house. In the meantime, he consciously links what he sees to the defining term “Negro.” The house is the servant quarters; they smell of Negro existence; and he, a white man, eats Negro food (ID 7-11). His sense of the racial code mixes with his teenager pride and compels him to take action.

Chick understands the true reason for his forced, unnatural action to assert his whiteness. It is the “initial error, misjudgment” (ID 11). In other words, Chick is not blind to his real motive. Lucas' simple, direct orders and his unusual composure in front of Chick violate his understanding of black servility and hurt his pride as a white man. In Lucas’ manners Chick feels the intrusion of the social code which is demanded of a Negro. Hence he struggles to convince himself that his natural response to Lucas is wrong, and he must re-establish their social roles by paying Lucas for all the help.

Chick's ordeal is reminiscent of “the old curse” experienced by Roth Edmonds, the grandnephew of Ike in Go Down, Moses (107). Roth and Lucas' son Henry grow up together like brothers and at the sudden awaking of the racial difference between them, Roth starts to reject Henry. Roth’s mind leaps from the natural state in which he believes “the two houses...interchangeable” to the ancestral pride with which he insists on
“going home” (*GDM* 106, 107). The moment of their split envelops Roth “in a rigid fury of the grief he could not explain, the shame he would not admit” (*GDM* 108). Likewise, when Chick makes the gesture of white condescension by offering Lucas’ money for saving him, he feels the same dumbness and shame (*ID* 13). It seems certain that Chick will once again swallow the bitter fruit of a white boy’s heritage.

Chick suffers a second setback on his concept of social code. Lucas simply refuses his money, and with this refusal, refuses to be treated as a Negro. The incident leaves Chick with a “frantic and vain yet indefatigable” anger and humiliation, since Chick feels Lucas has “debased not merely his manhood but his whole race too” (*ID* 19). The consciously white side of Chick is jerked back into the foreground of his mind. Chick has to find a way to fight back Lucas so as to regain not only his own worth but the pride of the white race of which he is a part of.

The growing sense of responsibility as a man in his family and community that have characterized the previous boys like Quentin and Ike is also evident in Chick. But Chick has more willingly undertaken his part of social role. He has been doing errands at his uncle Gavin’s office for a long time, just to “carry some of his own weight” (*ID* 19). When his sensitivity as a young man gets hurt by Lucas, Chick chooses to stand with the conventional white Jefferson men, thinking “We got to make him
be a nigger first. He’s got to admit he’s a nigger. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted” (ID 16).

Chick’s initial frustration at Lucas’s rejection of the money is heightened by his continued ruminations on how to redeem his pride. He tries to repay Lucas, sending him gifts at Christmas. Out of a white man’s rage to subdue a Negro, Chick sends another gift to Lucas’ wife, a new imitation silk dress, evidently useless for an old Negro woman. Lucas answers Chick’s childish insult by having a white boy bring him a bucket of molasses. Chick knows that he loses once more in the contest for power.

The last setback to Chick’s sense of superiority brings a stop to his retaliation. Chick admits the futility of his efforts, for “whatever would or could set him free was beyond not merely his reach but even his ken” (ID 21). By removing himself from the socially constructed power game, Chick once more recognizes Lucas’ humanity after the death of his wife, thinking “You don’t have to not be a nigger in order to grieve” (ID 22).

It is this very understanding of Lucas as a man, not as a Negro, that sets Chick free from the social stereotyping of Negroes into inferior classes. Quentin never really achieves such an understanding. Ike comes somewhere to the same point in reading the McCaslin ledger, but he does not proceed to participate in the crisis that Chick faces later. Chick’s awareness of the human compassion beneath a colored skin is
fundamental to his coming into Lucas’ rescue, an act that agonizingly complicates his understanding of the social code.

One of the earlier signs of Chick’s silent breaking away from the collective mentality appears when Lucas is accused of murdering a white man. All the community awaits a lynching to punish a nigger that dares to shoot a white. In contrast, Chick uses for the first time “they” to refer to his fellowmen “They’re going to make a nigger out of him once in his life anyway” (*ID* 28). When he sees and hears the town’s relentless anger at a “nigger murderer,” his anxiety for the impending mob lynching is such that he wants to saddle his horse and goes out of town until “all over finished done” (*ID* 36). Unconsciously, Chick has become an anguished spectator of his own community and separated himself from their outcries.

What troubles Chick is not merely the hatred of some whites, but the attitude of such reasonable people as Mr. Lilley. Mr. Lilley the grocery storekeeper has “nothing against...niggers,” but only “requires...they act like niggers” (*ID* 42). According to his uncle Gavin, the outrage of Lucas’ crime is that he confirms to Mr. Lilley’s understanding of nigger behavior, making the white man believe that all Negroes want to kill white men and that lynching is necessary. In a word, it is all part of the social code to observe: the nigger like a nigger and the white like the white, “both of them observing implicitly the rules” (*ID* 42).
Even Gavin, the lawyer with good sense and intelligence, does not question about Lucas’ “crime.” Gavin visits Lucas in the jail, ready to defend him. The reason for his good intentions is that, being a lawyer, he believes the justice should come through law rather than lynching. He views Lucas only as a Negro, and believes the latter's misfortune comes from his failing to observe the code. He tells Lucas, “[H]as it ever occurred to you that if you just said mister to white people and said it like you meant it, you might not be sitting here now?” (ID 54) The questioning reveals that Gavin shares essentially the same code with the rest of the white community. They all want the punishment to follow “the right way.” The white want the social code. Gavin wants the code of law. None except Chick knows the man and understands his pride and humanity.

The cultured code has not sunk too deep to blind Chick from his observation of the facts. Chick’s experience has told him about Lucas as an individual, a man: composed and sympathetic, polite but dignified, the very type of old man he would admire. Chick intuitively learns Lucas is too much of a man to be reduced to a nigger who shoots from behind a white man's back. Despite his previous conflicted feelings towards Lucas’ treatment of him, Chick simply cannot accept the abstraction of Lucas into a mere nigger murderer.

Chick finally drops his acquired prejudice against Negroes to help
Lucas. In doing so, he even turns away from the lecture of his uncle Gavin. Fortunately this time Chick is aided by two others: his Negro friend Aleck and an old white woman Mrs. Habersham, as if to testify the words of the Negro Ephraim,

“Young folks and womens, they aint cluttered. They can listen. But a middle-year man like your paw and your uncle, they cant listen. They aint got time. They’re too busy with facks.... If you ever needs to get anything done outside the common run, dont waste yo time on the menfolks: get the womens and children to working at it” (ID 62).

The adventure of Chick and his companions, as we learn from the story, holds tremendous impact on more than one character. Producing solid evidence, it convinces the Sheriff, the District Attorney and Judge Maycox of Lucas’ innocence. Gavin too learns a little humility to correct his wrong judgment on Lucas and his nephew Chick. But most importantly, it brings into open light the injustice of the code that Chick now finds most violently repulsive. Chick begins to question his own tradition, upon realizing that there is

something shocking and shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it, which otherwise might have flared and blazed merely out of Beat Four and then vanished back into its darkness or at least invisibility with the fading embers of Lucas’ crucifixion (ID 118).

The discovery of the injustice of the code against an individual man is an even worse psychologically damaging revelation than the previous one Chick has to writhe with. Chick begins to visualize his own fellowmen in terms of collective menace “the faces myriad yet curiously identical in
their lack of individual identity, their complete relinquishment of individual identity into one We...almost gala in its complete obliviousness of its own menace” (ID 117). The admission of inherent inhumanity in the code triggers Chick's further removal from his society, and if not for his uncle Gavin, he would have possibly ended up another Ike.

Gavin's influence on Chick is to help him reconcile to his own tradition and people. Malcolm Cowley explained that, according to Faulkner, Gavin speaks “for the best type of Southern liberals.” The “fundamental beliefs” behind Gavin’s speech to Chick is what Cowley called “equal justice and...Southern independence,” beliefs that Cowley rightly judged as “in violent conflict” (The Faulkner-Cowley File 110, 102). Despite the inherent conflict, Gavin’s influence works on Chick and pulls his nephew back into his society.

Chick's reintegration occurs as a result of Gavin appealing to his sense of the South as an entity and reassuring him of the ultimate victory of justice. Even at the time of his repudiating the code, Chick is acutely aware that he too is “bred of it” (ID 118). His constant shifting between the acceptance and rejection of his tradition is revealed in the juxtaposition of his mind and Gavin’s speech when he leads the Sheriff to discover the evidence. The view of “his whole native land, his home—the dirt, the earth which had bred his bones and those of his fathers for six generations and
was still shaping him into not just a man but a specific man” brings back Chick’s awareness of the South as intruded upon by the North (ID 128). This abstraction of the North as an idea that Chick is brought up to “be ever and constant on the alert…to defy” reaffirms his emotional link to the land of South and its people (ID 129).

Gavin intensifies Chick’s emotional bond to the society by emphasizing the South as a land of homogeneity. The white and the black must work together to defend “a national character” against the intervention from the North’s legislation (ID 131). Gavin admits that the Negro should be granted his freedom and rights, but the granting of these should come from within the South, for the injustice is in the South who must “expiate and abolish it…alone and without help” (ID 173). This end will not come too easily or too soon. Gavin helps Chick to the realization of the complexities of life that “Some things you must always be unable to bear. Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame” (ID 174).

Chick’s shame and anger at his people is pacified by Gavin’s argument that justice is being done because the community will all feel “Lucas Beauchamp once the slave of any white man...now tyrant over the whole county’s white conscience.” This event will help the white realize that he has “not ... injured his fellow so much as having been wrong” (ID 168).
According to Gavin, not only Lucas himself, but Sambo the Negro will benefit in the long run from this sudden awakening of “pity and justice and conscience” in the white community (*ID* 171). With more and more people willing to act for justice, Gavin urges Chick to restore his faith in mankind.

At this point, Chick reaches his final reconciliation. He is reminded of those who have acted with a good conscience “Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham…Uncle Gavin and a sworn badge-wearing sheriff” and understands that he has acted out of “that fierce desire...that furious intolerance of any one single jot or tittle less than absolute perfection” (*ID* 177). In trying to push for justice, he commits the same mistake that his fellowmen makes: to set himself above others and view them in an abstraction of values or vices. Chick admits himself being “righteous,” and feels once more entering “the vast teeming anonymous solidarity of the world” (*ID* 177,175).

The reestablishment of Chick as a member functioning in his society is a conscious effort on Faulkner’s part to separate his later characters from Quentin’s self-obliteration and Ike’s marginalization. Although Chick’s turning around seems less heroic than Ike’s, it is also less tragic. It marks a growing awareness of Faulkner to invest the boy characters with social responsibilities nurtured in the best of Southern tradition. There is a
minor case in point. A few years after the publication of *Intruder in the Dust*, Faulkner introduced an unnamed boy character “T” in a short story “Race at Morning.” The boy is very much a character cast in Ike’s image, with Mister Ernest to direct him all the way through his hunting. At the close of the story, instead of having the boy reflecting on the hunting experience, Mister Ernest abruptly takes up the subject of education. He insists on the boy going to school, because

> you [the boy] got to know why. You can belong to the farming and hunting business and you can learn the difference between what’s right and what’s wrong, and do right. And that used to be enough -- just to do right. But not now. You got to know why it’s right and why it’s wrong, and be able to tell the folks that never had no chance to learn it; teach them how to do what’s right, not just because they know it’s right, but because they know now why it’s right because you just showed them, told them, taught them why. So you’re going to school. (Faulkner, par. 76)

Faulkner did not create another Ike in “Race at Morning.” He had the elder Mister Ernest instill into the boy a vision for his future role in society: not only to “do right” but understand why it is right and teach others so. Clearly, Faulkner had moved on from the second stage of “sitting on a pillar” to the third stage of “doing something about it” (*Faulkner in the University* 245-246). To achieve this purpose, the boy heroes are increasingly exposed to social conditioning forces that motivate them along the way. Ike has Sam to help him “do right” and cast off the sins of his heritage. Chick has Lucas for a similar purpose, but he also needs an intelligent Gavin to make him realize why it is wrong, to
undertake his share in his community. If Chick’s turning around seems a little didactic, Faulkner’s last hero Lucius Priest will prove a better example of an individual’s growth molded by the influence of people and events surrounding him.

3. Lucius Priest

In Quentin’s grave destiny the reader sees a corrupt environment: burdens of the past and racial mindset breeding its own doom, a dis-functioning family offering no intellectual guidance or emotional relief, as well as the severing of personal ties. This is why, as I have tried to argue, that the sadness comes to Quentin “not from one or another incident...but rather from the group to which he belongs.” Viewed in this light, there is nothing in Quentin that cannot “serve as an occasion for suicide” (Durkheim 301). This may help to explain the fact that such varied discussions and interpretations about Quentin’s suicide exist.

As Faulkner moved on in his career, he became more alert to the social conditioning of his boy heroes and gradually pulled down the walls enclosing their lives. The later stories such as *The Unvanquished*, “Barn Burning,” *Go Down, Moses*, “Race at Morning,” *Intruder in the Dust* and *The Reivers* place the sensitive, brooding boys either in direct contact with helpful elders, or have them participate in personally constructive
journeys. The result of such subtle reconstruction of social elements dispels the shadow of doom in Quentin’s case and works to prove that an individual’s fate is closely tied up with the effectiveness of nurturing powers in the society.

_The Reivers_ is a case of Faulkner trying to demonstrate how effective these small currents of nurturing powers will prove once they run together. The story is told by a first-person narrator, Lucius Priest, who is actually an old man at the time of telling his story. So the novel has the advantage of combining the innocent voice of an 11-year-old with the backward glance of an old man. In the story, Lucius sneaks away from home in the car with Boon, the part Indian who works as the family driver for the Priests. Joined by the black man Ned, the three stop at Miss Reba’s brothel in Memphis where Ned, surprises them by swapping the car for a horse named Lightning. Ned has the horse transported to Parsham for a horse race where eventually they win and discover that the true intention of Ned is to use the profit gained from the race to save a kinsman Bobo from his debt.

Previously, one of the prominent problems with the boys before Lucius is that they have to combat with “blood” loyalty which often goes against a higher set of values. The blood problem shows itself either in racial or family issues, or sometimes in a combination of both. With Quentin and
Ike it is an extreme case of entanglement. The problem in “Barn Burning” is not racial so much as familial. Even Chick has to cope with a cynical, quick-tempered father in his household, a man who, like many whites, sneers at Chick’s effort to discover truth. Fortunately for Lucius, he is no longer emotionally strained by the blood loyalty problem. Instead, Faulkner has him witness virtues and vices from both races of black and white.

Of the truly nurturing powers none is blessed in the same way as Lucius Priest is. At home, he receives the discipline of his mother Alison and the guidance of his grandfather Boss. In the community he observes the gentleman’s agreement between his father and John Powell. On his adventure out into Memphis and beyond he learns from Ned and comes into contact with well-intentioned people like Miss Reba, Corrie, Sam, Uncle Parsham and Mr. Poleymus. Through overcoming his own fears and reluctance, Lucius not only adopts and practices the code of gentleman, but learns to face life in all its complexities.

Lucius observes the code of gentleman at the beginning of the novel when he mentions the implicit agreement between his father Mr. Maury and the black man John Powell. John works in the stable of the Priest family and carries with him a pistol to work as the “living badge of his manhood,” which is, however, not officially approved (R 726). John’s
position on carrying his pistol is immovable, which presents a “moral
problem” that Mr. Maury and John handle “as mutual gentlemen must
and should.” John never compelling Mr. Maury to acknowledge the pistol
and Mr. Maury never having to tell John to drop the pistol at home or drop
the work (R 729).

This “moral problem” and the gentlemanly way in which it is solved
foreshadow the condition that Lucius finds himself in when he goes on his
adventure with Boon and Ned. The existence of John’s pistol, by official
standard, is not allowed. But considering the importance of the pistol to
John’s sense of manhood, Mr. Maury and the others all give tacit consent.
Lucius’ journey resembles the pistol episode as well. He actually has to lie
to obtain it and thus faces a similar moral problem. Throughout most of
the journey Lucius struggles with “Virtue” and “Non-virtue.” He will find
the only way out is to recognize that life contains both and he must handle
“Non-virtue” in a gentlemanly way.

Another character who exercises good influence on Lucius in the
beginning of the story is his mother Allison. Ned, the coachman of Lucius’
grandfather, declares himself a direct descent from the McCaslin family,
saying “his mother had been the natural daughter of old Lucius Quintus
Carothers himself and a Negro slave” (R 749). Lucius’ mother Allison not
only calls Ned “Uncle,” but actually insists all her children respect him as
Uncle Ned. It is interesting to note that the Priests are not burdened by racial divisions as their ancestors are. The respect Allison and Mr. Maury show for their black worker is both a relief to the reader and a good instruction to young Lucius.

In the admirable family environment Lucius learns to practice his duty as an eleven-year old. Like Chick, he works once a week in the family business; but unlike Chick, the work is both an effort of Lucius to assume responsibility and the Priest family’s conscious training for him to “carry the burden of the requisite economic motions” (R 725). He keeps his promise to his mother not to drink, shows respect for elders in his community and would willingly take orders from a non-white like Boon Hogganbeck and Ned. In short, he is learning the responsibilities as a man, and is disciplined in the gentleman's code.

The idea of a journey out of Lucius’ community and into the larger world of Memphis and beyond is initiated by Boon, the man who has once disrupted the mutual gentleman agreement between Lucius’ father and John. Yet in this forbidden adventure Lucius always feel that he shoulders more blame. As a boy, Lucius has secretly wishes for a journey that serves the function of John’s pistol: to mark his manhood. Thus he feels he is no more tempted than naturally falls for Boon’s idea. Lucius recognizes that in their secret ambition he is “the leader…the boss…the master” (R 768).
The awareness of his own culpability continues to trouble him throughout his adventure.

In a symbolic sense Lucius is the “leader” of the journey, not because on his command Boon will drive back home in Jefferson, but because Boon with “the mentality of a child” is unable to engage in future events in the degree that Lucius is bound to (R 737). The journey starts out as a lie and a trick, but because “the badge of manhood” that Lucius earns at the end, his transgression is transformed by his sympathy for and daring defense of the weak, his natural concern about and indignation at the misuse of power, and his persistence of sharing others’ fate on his shoulders. So when Lucius emerges out of the journey, he has indeed outgrown Boon in more than one sense.

The weekend adventure is a new beginning for Lucius, symbolized by his leaving home without taking any clothes, and the hilarious Hell Creek scene in which all three of them, Lucius, Ned and Boon, are covered with mud from head to toe. Up to Hell Creek Lucius has been quite troubled by his lying and sneaking out. His guilt amounts to such high emotional tension that he wants “no more of his free will.” The fear and an urge to be with his mother makes him want to “return, relinquish, be secure, safe from...decisions and deciding.” At this point Boon’s role is to strengthen the will of Lucius by reminding him they have gone too far to stop (R 778).
When they are joined by Ned and together survive the mud-holes of Hell Creek, Lucius’ intensified guilt temporarily subsides. He realizes for the first time that crossing Hell Creek means they have “locked the portcullis and set the bridge on fire” (R 800). A baptism of mud Lucius receives as the starting point of his “Non-virtue,” he tries to convince himself of the necessity to pursue the trip with his companions.

Constantly alert to Lucius’ uneasiness, Boon is one of the first men to give the boy a lecture on the need to accept life as it is and learn something from it. When they arrive at Miss Reba’s brothel, Boon declares his role as one who helps the boy to gain knowledge from the adventure, “you done already learned a few things you never seen nor heard of before, and I’m proud to be the one to be along and help you learn them” (R 809). Emphasizing the need to learn, Boon explains, “there aint nothing you ever learn that the day wont come when you’ll need it or find use for it,” and he cautions Lucius:

“Everything a m-fel-boy sees and learns and hears about, even if he don’t understand it at the time and cant even imagin he will ever have any use to know it, some day he will have a use for it and will need it, providing he has still got it and aint give it away to nobody” (R 809).

Boon’s role in the story is primarily set by Faulkner as a trouble maker. He brings the first quarrel and fight on the Priest’ farm and then entices Lucius into leaving home. Although Boon may be guilty of speaking on the occasion to defend his taking Lucius out of home, he nonetheless hits on
the relationship between a man's motive and what he actually does. Faulkner seems to have this robust but unintelligent man to voice a wisdom similar to what Ned and Boss will teach Lucius later. The fact that Lucius, on retrospect, remembers the first lesson given by Boon is proof of his awareness of the attitude a man should adopt towards new, unpleasant events in his life.

With Boon giving advice, Faulkner clearly presented a different vision on life: that there are disparities between what one expects and what it turns out; but as a man, there is nothing that stops him from learning and facing it with the gentleman’s code. If Boon the man with a childlike mentality is endorsed with this understanding, the reader won’t be surprised to find that Faulkner provided other characters with the same attitude. At the beginning of the story, Lucius has witnessed the gentleman’s agreement and compromise between his father and John Powell about the illegal pistol. Now on the road of adventure, he is about to learn more of abrupt or unpleasant happenings in life and how people around him deal with these with courage and sympathy. For example, at the Memphis brothel, there is a Mr. Binford who is the landlord...the lone male not even in a simple household of women but in an hysteria of them...the single frail power wearing the shape of respectability sufficient to compel enough of order on the hysteria to keep the unit solvent or anyway eating...the prince and paragon: a man of style and presence and manner and ideas: incorruptible in principles, impeccable in morals, more faithful than many husbands during the whole five years he had been Miss Reba’s lover (R 816).
Mr. Binford tries to run the house with a gentleman’s principle, even if it is only a brothel. Lucius witnesses how shamed Mr. Binford is at his only weakness of betting on horse racing. The boy also learns from Miss Reba and Corrie that Mr. Binford has once deserted the brothel out of shame for his gambling and tried to earn back the money lost on horse races with his own hard labor. Lucius hears the women’s compassion towards Mr. Binford’s weakness, and sees their effort to reconcile their principles with the man they love and respect. When the need arises for transporting the horse to Parsham, Miss Reba, Corrie and a black man Sam Caldwell offer no grudging help in this risk-taking journey. Miss Reba and Corrie accompany the horse to the station. Sam contrives with Ned to transport the horse on the train and he even makes a bond to get Ned out of custody. In Parsham, Uncle Parsham accommodates Ned, Boon, Corrie and Lucius, handles Butch’s harassment with dignity, and accompanies Lucius at his most depressing moments. Lucius feels in the old black man “decency and intelligence” when he repeats twice “just like Grandfather did” (R 924, 925). It is Uncle Parsham who insists on treating Lucius as a man and demands Ned to tell the truth because Lucius has “stood everything else you folks got him into since you brought him here; what makes you think he cant stand the rest” (R 930). Uncle Parsham’s dignity, courage and sympathy become a good reassurance to the boy who gets lost and helpless
when he is left on his own with his work in the horse race. Even Mr. Poleymus, the constable who brings Ned and Boon into custody, shows a compassion and sacrifice towards his bedridden wife for he has to wash her and feed her and lift her in and outen the bed day and night both, besides cooking and keeping house too unlessen some neighbor woman comes in to help. But you don’t know it to look at him and watch him act ($R 932$).

The constable’s understanding shows itself once more when he allows Lucius to stay with Uncle Parsham, and when he bets on Ned’s horse to give his support.

The women in *The Reivers* provide more varied examples to Lucius on the ingenuity, grace and pity inherent in ordinary human beings. Lucius’ mother Allison does not limit herself to teach the boys sound principles. She also enjoys life and loves a good ride in Grandfather’s new automobile, with her “face flushed and bright and eager, like a girl’s” ($R 757$). Grandfather Boss has a habit of chewing and spitting tobacco, so she comes up with an ingenious screen to enable her and the boys to enjoy the ride with Grandfather in the car. Even at Miss Reba’s brothel, the very place of “Non-virtue,” women possess a lively spirit, compassion and courage rarely seen in previous novels of Faulkner. Miss Reba, the owner of the brothel, manages to handle the place to give it an air of civility. She immediately recognizes the good breeding in Lucius upon the boy’s arrival, and favors him over the sleek Otis as she remarks to Corrie “You brought
that nephew of yours over here hunting refinement. Here it is, waiting for him...maybe Lucius could learn him to at least ape it” (R 807). The quickness of mind and courage is shown in Miss Reba's facing and driving Butch away, the policeman who comes repeatedly to harass Corrie. A girl named Minnie in the brothel reveals a sympathetic and understanding nature by recalling Mr. Binford's previous effort to check his gambling habit, and pleads with Miss Reba not to let the man leave helplessly because Mr. Binford “was ashamed of his-self and for his-self both, for being so weak, of there being anything bigger than him...he would promise us and mean it, like he done that time two years ago” (R 817). It is from Minnie Lucius gets to know all the admirable history of Mr. Binford as landlord as well as lover of Miss Reba, to help him understand the complexities between “Virtue” and “Non-virtue.”

Yet the most inspiring sign of “Virtue” among “Non-virtue” is found with Corrie, or Everbe Corinthia, as she is originally called before she enters the brothel. Years of living as a prostitute have not dampened her spirit of love, compassion and courage. Her love and virtue is manifest in taking care of her nephew Otis and hoping redemption for the morally corrupt boy. Her good nature naturally draws her to Lucius’ purity. When she learns Lucius has fought Otis for the latter’s betrayal of her honor, she responds in such a way that her life is totally transformed. She decides to
quit the “profession” and makes a decent living of honest labor. Wasting no time on mourning past mistakes and blaming others, she courageously takes responsibility for her past. She tells Lucius “Back there in Arkansas it was my fault. But it wont be my fault anymore” (R 854). What’s more, she makes a solemn promise to Lucius and requires him to take it, therefore binding them together in terms of mutual responsibility, growth and redemption. Musing to himself, Lucius realizes that he

has to learn too fast...have to leap in the dark and hope that Something—It—They—will place your foot right. So maybe there is after all something besides just Poverty and Non-virtue who look after their own (R 854).

It is the first time in the story that Lucius grows conscious of his capability to inspire a moral uplift.

Corrie’s influence on Lucius goes beyond giving him a sense of obligation, compassion and brotherhood. She ultimately plays the role of forcing Lucius to see the pitiful human condition and comprehend the value of a morally ambiguous decision. By trading herself with Butch the policeman, she earns the freedom of her friends and the horse back in time for the race. Lucius is deeply disturbed by Corrie’s choice. He is first furious at Ned, at himself, and at the failure of men to protect a woman, leaving Corrie to give up her honor for others (R 931). Next comes his writhing with the idea that Corrie has broken her promise, shouting “She’s quit. She promised me.” The “anguish, rage, outrage, grief” remain
unchanged in Lucius for a while, until he wins the race and finally comes around to the extent of Corrie’s sacrifice (R 932). At the time of Miss Reba trying to distribute fairly the money won on the horse race, Lucius observes Corrie sitting there “too big for little things to happen to, too much of her to have to be the recipient of things petty and picayune...too big to shrink even, shamed...” (R 950-951). The “bigness” of Corrie is evidently a metaphor for her loving and enduring spirit. Realizing Corrie waits with shame for his judgment on her breaking the promise, Lucius is made aware that her act cannot be denied as a transgression of moral principle, but must be taken as a painful sacrifice. At this point Lucius is able to accept her again and reassure her “It’s all right...You did have to. We got Lightning back in time to run the race. It dont matter now any more” (R 951).

Of all male characters in the story, Ned’s behaviors demonstrate a greater resilience and subtlety that the young boy vividly remembers but could hardly comprehend. Earlier in the story, Ned shows a remarkable talent in maneuvering the situation to satisfy his own needs while still coming to a gentlemanly understanding with Grandfather Boss on many things. When the new automobile arrives, it is Ned the coachman’s duty to take care of the car. But Ned, with his characteristic haunting around, does not always come to answer Grandmother’s call. Ned’s habit gives
Boon chances to take over the wheel as the driver for the Priests and in light of the power usurped, Ned and Grandfather Boss have met on some unspoken gentlemen’s ground regarding it: Ned never to speak in scorn or derogation of its ownership and presence, Grandfather never to order Ned to wash and polish it as he used to do the carriage” (R 754).

After being caught lying under “the jumbled mass of tarpaulin which...filled the back of the car,” Ned unabashedly reminds Boon that he’s got “just as much right to a trip” because he is a McCaslin, and because the automobile “belongs to Boss and Lucius aint nothing but his grandboy and you aint no kin to him a-tall” (R 781-82). Their destiny is miraculously transformed by Ned swapping the car for a horse on the first night in Memphis. Ned takes advantage of Grandfather Boss’ preference for horses and boasts of his talent of making the twice-beaten horse win out in the race, all exaggerated high tale to the disbelief and shock of Boon and Lucius. Ned is also noticed by Lucius to enjoy charming women and cracking a bit of rough joke wherever he can. Taking the horse into the Memphis brothel, Ned seems to fall immediately for Minnie’s gold teeth. His first words to Minnie sound a carefree invitation

“—money you talking about, Good-looking, I got it or I can get it. Lemme get this horse put up and fed and me and you gonter step out and let that tooth do its shining amongst something good enough to match it, like a dish of catfish or maybe hog-meat if it likes hog-meat better” (R 820).

Minnie’s rejection does not discourage Ned, and he soon finds a fat cook in Parsham to transfer his affection and promises.
On the other hand, Ned is often penetratingly observant on human character and is capable of involvement in most serious matters. His knowledge of the people’s kindness and love of fun gains him easily the cooperation of the women at the brothel to help transport the horse Lightning. He is the only one to see through Otis’ appearance and detect the boy’s real age. Responding to Uncle Parsham’s taking the policeman Butch’s order as law, Ned remarks that “it aint the badge so much as that pistol….he don’t run no risk of being threwed in jail and having it took away from him; he can still be a little boy in spite of he had to grow up” (R 875). Apart from his knowledge of people, Ned is deeply conscious of individual rights. On one occasion he asks Butch for the official warrant to arrest him; on another, he stops the constable from taking Lucius away, convincing the latter with his argument “There’s somewhere the Law stops and just people starts” (R 921). Ned’s humanity and compassion reveals itself most fully in his defense of the horse race to save Bobo from heavy debts. When the sympathetic men inquire why Bobo does not ask for help, Ned’s quiet statement of a racial fact puts all to silence “You’re a white man… Bobo was a nigger boy” (R 957).

In addition to joking and charming around to lighten up the troubled thoughts of Lucius, Ned’s most ingenious and impressive maneuver is to swap the car for the horse Lightning. In doing so, he engages all in a
concerted effort towards initially what looks like an outrageous trick. Ned’s ambition carries a special significance for Lucius as the boy is involved in a situation where he has always shunned from making a commitment. If Corrie has first made Lucius aware that he has played a part in the future of a woman’s life, Ned, by making the boy a jockey and riding the horse to victory, instills in him the duty and honor of being a member of a group. At the time of receiving Corrie’s promise, Lucius’ hesitation is still obvious. A reluctant participant, he is unwilling to contribute his share in this group of new acquaintances. In other words, he is like the horse Lightning, who has the potential in him but needs to be trained to “run.” The whole business of training the horse is also the course of Lucius learning to participate as an active member. In a series of races, Lucius becomes more and more conscious of his mission to win. The final victory comes when he follows faithfully Ned’s instruction, “know Lightning is where he can see the whole track in front of him” (R 943). On a deeper level of interpretation, it is obviously Lucius’ knowing of the purpose that serves as a precedent for the horse to know. Finishing the race the first, Lucius’ joy is unparalleled at his ability to know and make it happen, as he reflects on his having “ridden and won...first race...a man-size race, with people, grown people, more people than I could remember at one time before, watching me win it and...betting their
money that I would” (R 945). If the mud baptism separates him from his conceptualized idea of virtue, this first win brings Lucius back into his place among his people, to the realization that there is always a possibility to strive and achieve the best even under unfavorable circumstances of “Non-virtue.”

If Faulkner had stopped with Ned’s swapping the car for the horse as a mere grand trick, the image of Ned as Lucius’ mentor would have been built on quicksand. But it did not happen. Ned’s last enduring lesson to Lucius is the revelation of using the horse and winning money for a higher aim: to save a fellow black young man Bobo from his impending ruin. As Ned narrates the misfortune of Bobo, the white men gather to hear the tale: a Negro boy mixing up with white blackguards gets himself heavily into debt, and is on the edge of committing theft before Ned comes to his rescue. Bobo’s story is nothing extraordinary for a Negro boy from the country. To hear the story told the reader feels like reviewing the black man Samuel’s early life before his execution in “Go Down, Moses”: a similar road of corruption from gambling to debts, theft and execution. Bobo would possibly commit more serious offences if not for Ned’s intervention. Ned’s behaviour forms a moving contrast with Roth Edmonds, who drives his black brother away from his farm. Mollie’s mourning “Roth Edmonds sold him,” at the loss of her grandson Samuel,
may be regarded as an accusation of the white man’s rejection of taking responsibility over his kinsmen (GDM 353). In *The Reivers*, however, the sense of a gentleman’s obligation towards members in his society reveals itself in most characters, black or white, rehearsed in Lucius taking Corrie’s promise and culminating in Ned’s horse race that saves Bobo’s future.

By moving dexterously between “Virtue” and “Non-Virtue”, Ned teaches Lucius to comprehend a common sense and humanity that goes beyond the abstraction of values. Ned is always ready to appreciate the positive element in unfavorable conditions. He tells the grief-ridden Lucius that they should be much obliged to Corrie for her trading with Butch. After Boon hits Carrie for her giving in to Butch’s sexual blackmail, Lucius is astonished at Boon’s violation of the gentleman’s code. Again Ned comforts the furious boy with a piece of simple wisdom because there is no “better sign than a black eye or a cut mouf” a woman wants “from a man that he got her on his mind” (R 937). Lucius finally comes to Ned’s understanding, and practically repeats Ned’s teaching when he reassures Corrie about the necessity of her sacrifice (R 932). Showing just as much respect for Lucius as Uncle Parsham and Grandfather Boss, Ned insists on having Lucius present when sharing the secret of running the horse, for “Anybody got a right to know what his benefits is” (R 956). Lucius
learns from Ned's attitude that there is something more profound than his previous concept of the code, and that his father's physical punishment for his breaking the rule is inadequate.

At this point of the story the wise old man of the Priests emerges to usher Lucius into the adult world of wisdom. Grandfather Boss, as called by the children, is the patriarch of the family. A man of foresight, compassion and honor, he is the first in Jefferson to buy a car and one of very few people to estimate the business potential of the automobile. On Ned's “stealing” the horse for Bobo's sake, Boss reaches an understanding with Ned and resolves the matter with one more race in which Ned lets Lightning fail so that Boss loses his bet to the horse master Mr. van Tosch as a gentleman will do. At the house of the Priest, Boss takes over Lucius from Mr. Maury's hands. As Lucius cries his heart out, Grandfather explains:

“A gentleman can live through anything. He faces anything. A gentleman accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burden of their consequences, even when he did not himself instigate them but only acquiesced to them, didn’t say No though he knew he should” (R 969).

This last piece of wisdom guides Lucius to his future and aptly summarizes the trial he has gone through. The adventure has become a kind of baptism for the coming of age of the young gentleman. At the beginning of the journey, Lucius is absorbed by his troubled thoughts of his culpability in sneaking away from home. His awareness of
responsibility is limited to lying and contriving with Boon. It is very
difficult for him to refrain from the idea of turning simply homeward and
leaving his companions behind. As his inner sense of honor prompts him
to beat Otis for the latter’s betrayal of Corrie, Lucius begins to gain an
idea of responsibility for those he comes into contact with. But at this time
he is still the reluctant gentleman who “wanted to go home and just wasn’t
brave enough to say so, let alone do it” (R 928). Ned’s remark on the
horse’s habit sounds amusingly true of Lucius who does not like “to be in
front. He wants to run right behind up until he can see the finish line and
have something to run at” (R 912). The three-heat race gradually warms
up Lucius until he sees clearly at the end that there is no invading of his
responsibility. He must “go on, finish it...Ned and me both even if
everybody else had quit” (R 950). His willing commitment to the race
symbolizes his active participation in life and the readiness to “live with
it” (R 968).

The episode of Boss instructing Lucius is similar to scenes of elder
man instructing young men in a number of works, Chick and Gavin in
_Intruder in the Dust_, the boy “I” and Mister Ernest in “Race at Morning,”
Ike and Sam in _Go Down, Moses_ as well as Quentin and Rosa in _Absalom,
Absalom!_. Yet none of the previous education achieves the end in _The
Reivers_—an integration of the boy into his society with an awareness of
complexities of life and a willingness to take his responsibilities. Grandfather’s advice is very important to Lucius, but what might be more valuable is the adventure of Lucius that enables him to experience life’s ambiguities and the various ways men and women use to bring out the joy amid its chaos and frustrations. The universe of *The Reivers* is a benevolent one where corruption is checked and little humble efforts are appreciated and rewarded. Bush the nuisance policeman is taken into custody. All the warm-hearted people, Miss Reba, Minnie, Sam, the constable included, win money from the race. Ned helps Bobo to pay off the debt. Corrie finds a job and marries Boon. Having lived with all the ordinary and happy people, there is no reason why Lucius should not get his reward of growth at the end.
Conclusion

The first four chapters have focused exclusively on Quentin’s interaction with his environment in order to adequately account for the “because” question as posed by sociologist Jean Baechler: “what is happening that one has sought such a solution to such a problem by killing himself” (54).

In retrospect, it might be reasonable to conclude here that Quentin’s problem is not occasioned by any single factor, such as his inability to fulfill the Southern code of honor, the disruptive family influence from either of his parents, or his desire to possess his sister Caddy. Rather, it is a combination of forces at work that consistently corrupts Quentin’s mind, disabling its function of a healthy growth that will integrate itself into reality. As Durkheim pointed out in Suicide:

If...man is double, that is because social man superimposes himself upon physical man. Social man necessarily presupposes a society which he expresses and serves. If this dissolves, if we no longer feel it in existence and action about and above us, whatever is social in us is deprived of all objective foundation. All that remains is an artificial combination of illusory images, a phantasmagoria vanishing at the least reflection: that is, nothing which can be a goal for our action. Yet this social man is the essence of civilized man; he is the masterpiece of existence. Thus we are bereft of reasons for existence: for the only life to which we could cling no longer corresponds to anything actual; the only existence still based upon reality no longer meets our needs. ....So there is nothing more for our efforts to lay hold of, and we feel them lose themselves in emptiness. In this sense it is true to say that our activity needs an object transcending it (214).
Explained in Durkheim’s terms, Quentin’s problem, then, is largely his problem as a social man. His psychological trauma reflects what overwhelms him in social integration. The result of his inability to locate himself with a purpose in reality fills Quentin with an emptiness and futility of this life. As a young man in the white community, Quentin feels greatly burdened by his knowledge of the Old South. His conscience suffers as he listens to and constructs the Sutpen saga. His weariness and emotional distance prevents him, during the process of communication, to form a sympathetic understanding with any of the community members, Miss Rosa, Mr. Compson, or his roommate Shreve. In the meantime, unable to escape the racial coloring on his mind, he feels both entrapped in abstracting blacks as inferiors and repulsed about the blood shed as color line divides and twists humanity. One of his instinctive gestures is to withdraw from facing the social reality, so he cries “I don’t hate it!...I don’t hate it!” in Absalom, Absalom! and mechanically tramps his shadow into the dust in The Sound and the Fury (AA 378).

The alienation from the larger community forces Quentin to retreat into his immediate family environment. There, should he establish a positive relationship with any of the family members, he might have a chance of finding “reasons for existence” (Durkheim 214). However, it is a great misfortune to an individual like Quentin when his own family fails
its nurturing function, bringing him further depression and eroding on his sense of self-worth. When he lastly clings to the only “object” of love and sympathy in his sister Caddy, he is doomed to see Caddy rejecting his concern and marrying away.

The consequences of such repeated disorientations are devastating to a sensitive youth, making it impossible for Quentin to locate himself in any manageable relationships or sound social conventions. Quentin’s supposition on a society which he expresses and serves dissolves and he loses his identity and purpose in his existence. Durkheim explained, “[I]n such a state of confusion,” an individual is most prone to suicidal actions because “the least cause of discouragement may easily give birth to desperate resolutions. If life is not worth the trouble of being lived, everything becomes a pretext to rid ourselves of it” (214).

With the conclusion drawn on Quentin’s problem and the circumstances that make him a tragic figure, the understanding for the second question posed by Baechler on suicide naturally emerges. I have explained in the Introduction part that Quentin seeks suicide as “the solution to an existential problem” (Baechler 11). While his intention for transcending a mere physical being is annihilated in life, he must reject the kind of living as “an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names…a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts” (AA 12). To
take his own life becomes a significant act, a last resort that enables Quentin to at once escape the emptiness, and effect an initiation as a man of free will. Therefore, I assert once more that Quentin’s commits suicide in order to attach meaning to his life. It is “the end product of a whole process of thoughts, actions, and interactions over a prolonged period of time” (Douglas 321).

Placing my argument of Quentin Compson’s tragedy in a broader literary context, I have devoted Chapter Five to trace Faulkner’s progression of characterizations in a selection of his novels. Evidently Faulkner did not end his career with the tragic hero, and it is safe for me to conclude that in his later works he gradually moved out of the agony of a tragic universe, towards a more receptive, more engaging outlook on life. His works, from *Go Down, Moses* through *Intruder in the Dust* to *The Reivers*, comprise different stages at which Faulkner tried to bring out his vision of human life as best as he could: from denial through alienation, and ultimately towards affirmation.

Although the outlook of Faulkner on life seemed to be undergoing a change, the author nonetheless adhered to the same principle in crafting the destiny of the central heroes: that as ordinary beings they are profoundly affected by the kind of environment they grow up in. To quote from the sociologist Durkheim once more, “the social man” has to anchor
himself in society and to correspond to something actual (214). The ties of family and community therefore serve as solid foundation on which a man builds his sense of worth. Quentin’s problem rests in seeing all ties of social existence dissolve so that he could find nothing to lay hold of. It is not, however, brought out solely by his sister’s virginity, or a loveless mother, or obsession with the lost code of the Old South, though each one of these does contribute a part towards his doom.

In the same vein, evidence abounds in Faulkner’s construction of his later stories that there is positive correlation between a hero’s ability to survive and the ability of those around him to endure and exercise constructive influence. In Quentin’s case we find virtually none. All is wrapped up in a weary emptiness. But Ike has Sam to attend to his spiritual needs, thus he survives in the spiritual realm. Chick is lucky to receive examples of honor, compassion and courage from more than one character, which helps him to overcome emotional turmoil and reintegrate into his heritage. With Lucius, people seem to gather from home and afar to offer small and generous gestures of help. Not surprisingly Lucius suffers the least in terms of emotional trauma. Another trait of the heroes’ survival ability is closely linked with the degree of activeness with which they engage themselves as social men. Quentin fails to engage himself in any successful social activity. Ike finds his place being a good hunter and
is admired as such. Chick strives to prove Lucas’ innocence by digging up the grave with two others, a courageous act marveled at by his community. Lucius’ survival and growth is accomplished largely in the adventure, through observing actions rather than comprehending words.

With Quentin Faulkner depicted convincingly how a sensitive young man can be crushed in the midst of unresponsive, unsympathetic relationships. In his later works, Faulkner returned time and again to the sensitive young hero like Quentin. To understand his intention we might look at one of the sessions he held with the students of Virginia, where he answered a question about the function of a horse and its hostler in *A Fable*. Faulkner says,

“That was simply another struggle between man and his conscience and his environment. The horse was simply a tool—that is, that foul and filthy Cockney hostler was still capable of love for something. That maybe if he had a better childhood, a better background, he might have been capable of better love, of something more worthy than a horse. But he was capable of love for one thing, that he could sacrifice to and could defend, even though it was only a horse” (*Faulkner in the University* 63).

Faulkner’s remark on the hostler’s background and capacity for love illuminates the understanding of Quentin and his successors: that they are sensitive young men who share the ideal for honor and pity, courage and compassion. The successes of the later heroes from Ike onward follow the same road. All of them have been helped along by better human beings towards a better performance of their roles in society. This privilege is
altogether denied to Quentin. That Quentin takes his own life should not be a surprise in an environment where few respond to his call of love and honor. Nevertheless, the pursuit of an ideal that keeps Quentin “wonder, go on and wonder” lives on in Ike, Chick and Lucius, who finally move with the assistance of others from tragedy to affirmation.
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