

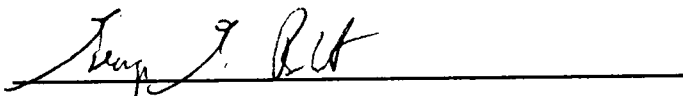
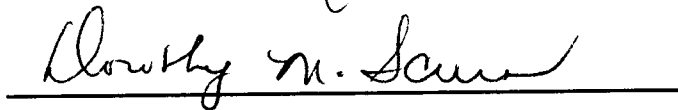
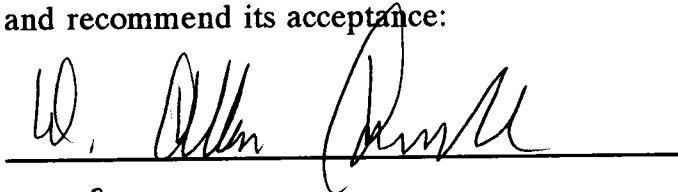
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Sonja Russell Haney entitled "Time and Knowledge in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

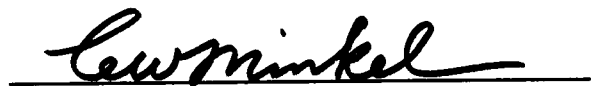


William Shurr, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

**TIME AND KNOWLEDGE IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S
*ABSALOM, ABSALOM!***

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sonja Russell Haney

August 1992

Copyright © by Sonja Russell Haney, 1992

All rights reserved

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. William Shurr for directing this dissertation. In addition to Dr. Shurr, I would like to thank Dr. Allen Carroll for his attention and careful readings of the many drafts. I would also like to thank Dr. Dorothy Scura for taking the place of an absent committee member on such short notice. I particularly would like to thank Dr. George Brenkert from the philosophy department for taking the time to discuss the contents of this study with me. In addition to these committee members, I would like to thank Pauline Hampton for spending many hours typing this study and for helping me meet deadlines. Most importantly, I would like to thank my mother, Alys Smith Haney, who supported me throughout my many years of study towards this degree.

ABSTRACT

This study attempts to examine Absalom, Absalom! in terms of Henri Bergson's metaphysical arguments concerning time and reality. I first argue that the absolute truth behind the series of events in the Sutpen material is absent from the text. Since critics have consistently assumed that Quentin's account of events is what Faulkner intended as the final presentation of the truth, I examine Quentin's role as narrator as well as his discovery of the missing "facts" concerning Charles Bon's heritage to show that his version of the Sutpen Story is not substantiated anywhere in the text as factual. Further, since the Langford study of the manuscript shows that Faulkner deleted material from the original which supported the truth of Quentin's version, I argue that Faulkner did so intentionally so that the sum of his narrative parts would refuse to coalesce into an absolute whole. Faulkner's insistence on keeping all of the knowledge of the Sutpen material relative to the individual narrative points of view then reflects Henri Bergson's metaphysical distinction between absolute knowledge and relative knowledge, or the distinction between knowledge of the absolute whole and knowledge of the relationship of conceptual parts. Specific points from Bergson's arguments concerning time and reality account for the failure of Absalom's narrators to arrive at the whole truth. The narrators' failure to account for the truth behind the whole duration of events is related to the same intellectual errors which Bergson has pointed to in the failed attempts of philosophers who have tried to account for time's real, whole and continuous

nature through a knowledge of the relative number, measure, or positioning of parts. A summary of major philosophical efforts, from Aristotle to modern-day, analyzing the nature of time elucidates Bergson's argument that the problems which have plagued philosophers result from the confusion of time with the mental concepts of math, space, and language. The confusion of these mental conceptions with the real nature of time leads to a denial of time's mobility, continuity, and change. Bergson's insistence that time, as well as all objects of reality, have been distorted by the intellect's attempt to freeze the mobility of reality by representing the absolute, unique "thing itself" in terms of repeatable, conceptual expressions explains the repetitive nature of the narrative accounts of the Sutpen material, as well as the failure of the individual characters who appear doomed to repeat their experiences. Bergson's warning concerning the falsification of the real through the substitution of the concept, word, or symbol for the "thing itself" elucidates the failure of Absalom's characters who cannot gain viable knowledge of their experiences. Bergson's point concerning the intellectual attempt to substitute conceptual attributes, or "partial expressions," for the whole real thing itself defines the cognitive patterns of Absalom's characters who seek to identify one another through a recognition of a few, arbitrarily selected attributes or conceptual parts. Studies in cognition concerned with the same partial identification processes support Bergson's point and help explain the failure of Absalom's characters. In the conclusion of this study I

apply specific points from Bergson's philosophy to a brief examination of As I Lay Dying, Light in August, The Sound and the Fury, and "The Bear."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
I. THE PROBLEMATIC TRUTH	27
II. THE QUESTION OF TIME	64
III. THE FAILURE OF KNOWLEDGE	113
IV. CONCLUSIONS	149
BIBLIOGRAPHY	179
VITA	191

INTRODUCTION

Absalom, Absalom! has often been cited as Faulkner's best work, yet in spite of its critical acclaim, readers and critics over the decades also have found the novel to be one of Faulkner's most difficult. The difficulty arises from Faulkner's innovative treatment of time and chronology, combined with his use of multiple narrators to reconstruct a single tale. A sense of linear chronology is disrupted and the distinction between the past and present becomes blurred as individual narrators bring memories of past events to their present consciousness. Events from the Sutpen family history occurring from 1807 to 1884 are exhumed from time by the narrators during the two days of the novel's present tense, a day in September, 1909, and a day in January, 1910. What the narrators ostensibly seek to discover "out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking" (A 303) is the truth behind a series of events which surround the killing of Judith Sutpen's supposed fiancé, Charles Bon, by her brother, Henry Sutpen. However, the truth behind the people and events which the narrators discuss remains conspicuously absent from the text since no single narrator, nor combination of narrators, can bring enough facts together to establish the truth.

The truth behind the occurrences in the Sutpen family history remains elusive, primarily because there just are not enough facts available to substantiate any of the narrators' versions of the material, including Quentin's final account which most readers assume is true. Another complication in the search for truth

in the novel rests on the nature of the facts presented. To begin with, the facts are difficult to assemble because they do not appear in the text in any logical order, but rather appear according to what has sparked a memory in an individual narrator. What comes next in Absalom appears to be determined by the "law of contiguity," a mechanism detected by Freud in the production of dream imagery where an idea or image is placed next to another through an element of association. Even after the novel is completed and all of the facts are assembled, however, it becomes apparent that the narrators are attempting to discover the truth behind a whole, continuous, duration of time, armed only with a relative knowledge of individual events within the whole order. They know the relative positioning of events, such as which event occurred "earlier-than" or "later-than" another, the length or measure of one event as compared or contrasted to another, or which event occurred "at" which place and "at" what time. However, it is impossible to add these individual facts together to establish the truth behind the continuous transition of events within the whole time span. Consequently, the attempt to know what has caused a particular event to occur, or why one event has preceded another, can only result in pure conjecture. In order to fill in the gaps due to the lack of transition between the events, the individual narrators offer their own interpretations which often become assimilated into the material of another narrator as fact. In the process, the distinction between fact and fiction becomes obscured.

In addition to the problem of separating facts from fiction arising from the different narrative interpretations, much of the information given in the text comes from old "mouth-to-mouth" tales handed down from generation to generation. For example, much of what is known about the early years of Thomas Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson comes from the reports of the coon-hunter, Akers, who comes back to town and tells the townspeople about the stranger and his "wild band of niggers" speaking in some unknown demonic tongue (French) as they work, stripped to the waist and covered with mud. Additional reports have been provided by some of the men from Jefferson who rode the twelve miles out to Sutpen's to see what the stranger was doing in the virgin wilderness. After watching Sutpen and his slaves, seemingly out of sheer will and determination, erect a house out of the Mississippi swamp, the townsmen came back with talk about what they had seen and brought "the legend of the wild men gradually back to the town" (A 36).

Much of what is known about the Sutpen family in the years prior to Charles Bon's murder is also derived from the old talk passed down through the generations. After Sutpen has acquired his wealth and family, gossip spreads from the "cabin-to-cabin talk" of slaves who report that Sutpen's son, Henry, has renounced his birthright and left home with his college friend, Charles Bon. From this information, the narrators take it as fact that Henry fought with his father because Sutpen had said something about Bon which Henry could not accept. Further, it is assumed that Bon must have been the intended bridegroom

of Judith since Ellen Sutpen had begun to be seen in town, flaunting her role as the wife of the county's wealthiest planter, and imposing on the shopkeepers by getting them to bring their most choice fabrics, which she said would be used for her daughter's trousseau, to her carriage for inspection. Ellen's talk around town about a "fairy-tale" wedding and an old letter supposedly to Judith from Bon, which never mentions love or marriage, are the only "evidence" of an intended betrothal, but the notion of a forbidden marriage is central to all of the narrative interpretations. However, more old talk around town poses a problem for the belief that Judith's marriage was forbidden. After Henry had left home with Charles Bon, apparently because Sutpen had forbidden the wedding, Judith and Sutpen were seen in town together on two occasions. At neither time did the father or daughter show the slightest signs of a disturbance in their relationship; they carried on their business together in town in such a manner as to contradict any idea that the father had frustrated the daughter in her plans to marry. Consequently, what has been seen or heard in the past becomes a contributing factor to the novel's present tense accounts of what actually occurred in the lives of those characters from the past.

The present tense narrators of Absalom attempt to bring all of the known material in the old tales together in order to arrive at a true account of what occurred in the past. However, as Faulkner demonstrates, when several people are brought together to establish a single truth, the whole truth disappears in the

addition of its parts. The whole truth behind Absalom also vanishes, rather than being retrieved, through the sum of its narrative parts.

There are four major narrators in Absalom: Rosa Coldfield, who of all the narrators was an actual participant in some of the past events; Mr. Compson, who has received much of his knowledge of the past from his father, General Compson, who was "the nearest thing to a friend" Sutpen ever had around Jefferson, Mississippi; and Mr. Compson's son, Quentin, and Quentin's Canadian-born, Harvard roommate, Shreve. In addition to these four narrators there is an anonymous, third-person narrator who has received little critical attention until lately. The third-person narrator, often referred to as the Faulkner narrator, opens every chapter, except Rosa's account in chapter five, and closes every chapter. The third-person narrator also adds commentary throughout the text, but his intrusion on his narrators' credibility is most evident in Shreve and Quentin's re-creation of events in chapter eight.

Rosa's account of what happened in the past opens the novel on a September afternoon in 1910 after she has summoned Quentin Compson to her home to listen to her tale about her sister Ellen's unhappy marriage to the demon, Thomas Sutpen, and the fateful lives of their children, Henry and Judith. Her narration in chapter one covers events from Thomas Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson, Mississippi, in 1833 through Sutpen's insult to Rosa in 1866. Most of Rosa's story, however, is centered on the early years of Sutpen's rise to wealth in Jefferson and his marriage to her sister, Ellen, all of which occurred before

Rosa's birth in 1845. Rosa also adds what she remembers as a child of three about Ellen bringing the children to church, and the daughter, Judith, like her ruthless father Sutpen, trying to engage the church-goers in a carriage race. Aside from a few brief visits when Sutpen was absent, Rosa never saw her sister's family because the relationship between her father, Goodhue Coldfield, and Thomas Sutpen had been strained for some unknown reason. Consequently, Rosa had been taught from childhood to think of Sutpen as a forbidden object and her sister Ellen as having vanished to some "Bluebeard's" island with her "ogre" children.

Mr. Compson takes up the narrative for the next three chapters as he and Quentin sit on the front porch on the same evening of Quentin's visit with Rosa in September, 1909. Quentin has come home from Rosa's but has promised to return at dark to take her out to the old Sutpen mansion where Rosa claims there is something hidden. In chapter two, Mr. Compson returns to the events surrounding Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson and the five years in which he spent building and furnishing his plantation until his marriage in 1838 to Ellen Coldfield, daughter of a small shopkeeper and a Methodist steward known for his moral uprightness. Much of what Rosa has emphasized about Sutpen as a man without a past, arriving in Jefferson with just a horse and two pistols, and somehow acquiring land from a "tribe of ignorant Indians," is repeated by Mr. Compson. However, Mr. Compson adds a different version to Rosa's claim that Sutpen had sought to conceal himself in the "respectability" of the town, and

particularly in the "respectability" of her family. Mr. Compson suggests that Ellen's father, Goodhue Coldfield, had initially supported Sutpen in an unsavory enterprise, but when he realized that the scheme was actually grossing a return, Coldfield's conscience refused to allow him any further relation with Sutpen although he did provide Sutpen with a wife. As Mr. Compson explains, when Ellen and Sutpen married, the town had become so suspicious of Sutpen's rise in wealth that only a half dozen people, including Quentin's grandfather and grandmother, attended the ceremony. However, a crowd had gathered from the outside fringes of town and when the couple emerged from the church, they were pelted with refuse by the rowdy crowd. Mr. Compson claims that he is sure Sutpen "did not forget that night" but suspects that Ellen forgot her tears shed in vanity.

For the next two chapters, Mr. Compson tells Quentin more about the members of the Sutpen family and Rosa's childhood. Mr. Compson explains that Rosa's childhood, having been raised by her father and a spinster aunt, was spent "in a grim mausoleum air of Puritan righteousness and outraged female vindictiveness." Born in 1845, at the cost of her mother's life, Rosa was four years younger than her sister Ellen's child, Judith. More details surrounding the Sutpen affairs emerge as Mr. Compson talks about Rosa's two extended stays at the Sutpen plantation; the first in 1860, the summer after Henry had brought his college friend, Charles Bon, home for a Christmas visit, and the other in 1865, after the death of Rosa's father. While describing Rosa's stay at the Sutpen

plantation in 1865 when Sutpen was away at war, Mr. Compson explains that Rosa helped keep up the house and plantation along with Judith and Sutpen's half-black daughter, Clytie (Clytemnestra), who was born to one of the slaves Sutpen had brought with him in 1833. Commenting on Clytemnestra's name, Mr. Compson suggests that Sutpen probably named all of his children, including the one before Clytie and Ellen's children, Henry and Judith. For the first time (chapter three) there is a mention of a son born to Sutpen previous to his marriage with Ellen. Chapter three ends with Wash Jones, the poor white squatter allowed on the Sutpen land, calling for Rosa in 1865. Although it is not known why Wash has called for Rosa at this time, later chapters reveal that Wash has come to tell Rosa about the murder of Bon. It is this incident which takes Rosa out to Sutpen's Hundred in 1865 to live until Sutpen returns from the War.

In chapter four, Mr. Compson begins to probe into Henry, Judith and Bon's relationship in hopes of establishing a motive for the killing of Bon. His narration concentrates on the three visits Bon paid to Sutpen's Hundred; the first, during Christmas, 1859, followed by a brief summer visit when college let out in 1860, and his final Christmas visit in 1860. The one fact which seems so problematic to Mr. Compson is that Henry waited four years after he rode away with Bon in early 1861 before killing him in 1865. Only love, assumes Mr. Compson, would be a strong enough force to bond three people together for so long, as well as account for murder. He makes three attempts to postulate love

as a motivating force. The chapter opens with the promise of love as Mr. Compson hands Quentin an old letter that Judith gave Quentin's grandmother to keep. However, when the contents of the letter are revealed forty-three pages later, nothing concerning the relationship between Judith and Bon is revealed. The letter bears no salutation nor signature, making it uncertain who was writing to whom, and mentions nothing concerning love nor marriage. Rather than establishing that the two loved each other, the contents of the letter turn Mr. Compson's promise of love into an ironic commentary on the Civil War by revealing that the contents were written with stove polish seized by a "gallant" effort of starved, Southern troops to win the war.

Rosa's voice is heard again in chapter five, obviously a continuation of what she said to Quentin in the late afternoon. In an attempt to justify her relationship with a man she had been taught to look on as a demon, she concentrates on her two lengthy stays (neither of her own volition) at Sutpen's Hundred which put her in the way of Sutpen. She notes that her father, away on business, sent her out to stay with Ellen in the summer of 1860 when Sutpen too was out of town. Although Rosa does not know where Sutpen was, it is revealed later through information passed on by Grandfather Compson, that Sutpen had gone to New Orleans, the home of Charles Bon. It was the summer also of Ellen's talk of a wedding as well as Rosa's awakening to love through the vicarious participation in her niece's romance, or supposed romance, since Rosa never saw Judith and Bon together, or even saw Bon at all. When Rosa returns

home, she exists on the idea of love, stealing cloth from her father's store to make crude garments for her niece's trousseau. However, she does not return to Sutpen's Hundred for five years. Even after her father, who had locked himself up in the attic for three years, dies in 1864, she still does not go back out to the Sutpen's home until Wash Jones calls to inform her of Charles Bon's murder on May 3, 1865. When Rosa arrives at the Sutpen home, she is astonished to find Judith shedding no tears as she stands outside of the room which holds Bon's body. Rosa notes that Judith was holding a picture frame which looked like the one she had given Bon with her picture in it, or at least Rosa thinks Judith gave Bon her picture since Rosa remembered seeing Bon's picture in Judith's room during her visit in 1860, and believed the two had exchanged pictures as lovers do. After the burial of Bon, whose body Rosa never saw, Rosa remains at the Sutpen home with Judith and Clytie until Thomas Sutpen comes home in the following January. Three months later she becomes engaged to Sutpen, and two months after the engagement, Sutpen speaks those "bold, outrageous words" to her. However, Rosa never tells Quentin what Sutpen said. Outraged by Sutpen's insult, Rosa returns home in 1866. In 1869 a passerby informs Rosa that Wash Jones has killed Sutpen with a rusty scythe. With Sutpen dead, Rosa tells Quentin that her right has been violated to have the man who was wrong admit it. However, by the end of the chapter Quentin has quit listening to Rosa's outrage because he is preoccupied with the thought of a brother killing his sister's fiancé.

Chapter six begins a new present tense for the novel and begins Quentin and Shreve's recreation of events which continues through chapter eight. Quentin is now in school at Harvard and is sitting in his room gazing at a recently arrived letter from his father dated January 10, 1910, informing Quentin of Rosa Coldfield's death. The time scheme in this chapter covers all past events, including the more recent past of Quentin's childhood hunting trip with his father when he discovered the tombstones in the Sutpen graveyard, and the most recent past, Quentin's trip with Rosa to the old Sutpen home on that September evening in 1909. Apparently Quentin and Shreve have been discussing the events in the Sutpen family history and Shreve quickly summarizes the events as he understands them, from Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson to his insult of Rosa, adding Rosa's demonizing tone to his account in jest. Shreve suggests that Sutpen came back home from the war and saw that his line of descendants had vanished with Henry, and knowing that he had little time or capacity left to provide himself with a male heir, offered to Rosa "that they breed together for test and sample and if it was a boy they would marry." Shreve thinks that after Rosa clamped her hat on her head and left in a fury, Sutpen turned his attention to the closest, non-kin, female available, Wash Jones' granddaughter, Milly. Shreve gives the events surrounding Thomas Sutpen's death in 1869. Wash Jones kills Sutpen with a scythe as he overhears Sutpen, while looking at Milly's newborn child, remark that if Milly had been like his mare, he might have given her a decent stall in his stable.

The talk of Sutpen's death leads to Quentin's memory of finding the Sutpen family tombstones on a hunting trip with his father. Events between Sutpen's death in 1869 and Judith's death in 1884 are added. Quentin's grandfather had remembered seeing an octoroon woman with a child, crying over Charles Bon's grave in 1870. A year later a strange little boy is seen in the care of Judith and Clytie. As the boy matures he becomes increasingly involved in fights, particularly with blacks. Grandfather Compson, who meets Judith to help bail the youth out of jail, finally connects him with the little boy seen at the graveside and realizes that the young man must be Charles Bon's son. This fact becomes substantiated by the name, Charles Etienne De Saint Velery Bon, Quentin sees on the tombstone. Charles Etienne leaves the Sutpen household but returns with a coal-black, retarded wife. He farms a piece of land around a slave cabin until he contracts smallpox. Judith brings Charles Etienne into the house to nurse him, but dies a week before Bon's son does. Only Clytie and Charles Etienne's idiot son, Jim Bond, survive on the old Sutpen property. Shreve ends the chapter by noting that when Rosa had told Quentin that someone was out at the old Sutpen home, Quentin assumed that it was the idiot Bond or Clytie, but Rosa had just said "No."

Chapter seven continues the talk between Quentin and Shreve on the evening in January, 1910. Shreve opens the chapter by remarking that Sutpen "just wanted a grandson," and closes the chapter by discovering that Milly's child was not a boy after all, but a girl. What appears in between is the story of

Sutpen's life before his arrival in Jefferson. The account of those years comes from Quentin's grandfather who had been told the story on two occasions, thirty years apart, by Sutpen himself.

Thomas Sutpen was born around 1807 in the mountains of West Virginia. When he was about ten and his mother had died sometime before, his father moved the family to a Tidewater, Virginia, plantation where his father found work. The Sutpen family existed on the plantation in the manner of poor whites, with housing and clothing of lesser quality than the black slaves. One day Sutpen's father sent him to the plantation house to deliver a message, the contents of which Sutpen never knew. Unknowingly, the young Sutpen went to the front door with the message and was told to call at the back door by a black servant. Confused and angered by this insult, Sutpen ran away from home, hoping to make the fortune he had heard was available in the West Indies. Eventually he ended up in Haiti where he secured a job on a sugar plantation as overseer. While he was working on this plantation, there was an uprising of the native slaves and he found himself barricaded in the plantation house with the owner and his daughter. When the situation looked hopeless, Sutpen walked out of the door and somehow subdued the natives, although he sustained a wound, which as Grandfather Compson said, almost left him a virgin for life. While recuperating from the wound Sutpen somehow became engaged to the planter's daughter. After a son was born to this woman, Sutpen learned something about the woman which made her and the child unsuitable for his life's "design." He

put the wife and child aside, compensating for them in more ways than the law would require, Sutpen believed, and left Haiti with a small band of slaves.

It is in this chapter that Charles Bon is identified as Sutpen's son by his first wife. The identity of Bon slips out of Quentin's mouth as he explains to Shreve that his father believed that Sutpen had named each of his children, even Charles Good. Shreve, who has been listening to Quentin's talk of what his father knew about the story, is shocked to hear that Mr. Compson realized that Bon was actually Sutpen's son since none of Quentin's talk of what his father had said ever indicated this fact. Quentin explains that he told his father about Charles Bon after he returned with Rosa from the Sutpen home. However, the text never reveals how Quentin came up with this piece of information.

Applying this new revelation concerning Bon's identity, Quentin and Shreve turn their attention in chapter eight toward the relationship among Henry, Judith and Charles. It is apparent that Shreve and Quentin want to set the stage for a romance. Both hope to prove that Judith and Charles loved each other enough to account for the four years in which the two supposedly waited to be married before Henry killed Bon. Quentin and Shreve re-create Judith and Bon's meeting during Bon's first Christmas visit in 1859, portraying the whole scene as a "blooming love." However, the Faulkner narrator intrudes on Quentin and Shreve's re-creation of events by warning that the account could not possibly be factual. The two then turn their attention to the second Christmas visit to Sutpen's Hundred in 1860 when the supposed argument occurred between

Sutpen and Henry, causing Henry to repudiate home and leave for New Orleans with Bon. Shreve and Quentin imagine that Sutpen told Henry that Charles could not marry Judith because he was her brother. However, the four years in which Henry waits to kill Charles remains a problem, so the two, Shreve and Quentin, set about creating a tale which would account for the wait. At first they imagine Henry struggling with, and reconciling, his Puritan conscience to the threat of incest by arguing that "kings had done it." However, if Henry has accepted the incest, another motivation for the murder must be supplied. The two Harvard youths, Quentin and Shreve, project themselves into the identity of the two youths of the past, Henry and Charles, by imagining a scene towards the close of the war in 1865. Bon and Henry, having been in the same Mississippi regiment since 1861, are camped in Carolina when Colonel Thomas Sutpen asks to see his son Henry. When Henry sees his father, whom he has not seen since the Christmas of 1860, he knows that Sutpen has somehow received the word that Judith and Charles now intend to marry. Shreve and Quentin envision Sutpen telling Henry the one thing he refused to tell any man, the factor which made him cast aside his first wife and son. They imagine Sutpen telling Henry, "He must not marry her, Henry. His mother's father told me 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" (A 355). Hearing this, Henry now knows what he must do if Bon persists in the marriage, and Bon, knowing

that Henry will kill him, substitutes the octoroon's picture for Judith's in hopes that she will not grieve when she discovers another woman's picture on his body.

The final chapter, chapter nine, reveals what Quentin and Rosa discovered at the old Sutpen home on the evening in September, 1909. Rosa had been right; there was somebody besides Clytie and Jim Bond in the house, and that person was Henry Sutpen, whom all assumed had been dead for years. The memory of that discovery comes back to haunt Quentin in his Harvard room after he and Shreve have finished their account of the events which led up to Charles Bon's murder. As Quentin remembers his brief, face to face encounter with Henry, who tells Quentin that he has come home to die, Quentin begins to jerk spasmodically. Shreve thinks that Quentin possibly may be reacting to the January cold but also recognizes that the violent spasms are too exaggerated to account for a cold shivering. Quentin's exaggerated reaction to his meeting with the live Henry becomes one of the novel's difficulties because it is not evident why Quentin should receive such an intense psychological shock, as well as claim that he shall "nevermore" have any peace.

Shreve provides the account of what happened to the last, living participants in the Sutpen story. Rosa waits three months to go back out to the old house with an ambulance to bring her nephew back to town. As Clytie sees the rescuers, she sets fire to the old mansion, perishing along with Henry in the flames. Seeing the fire, the idiot Bond begins to howl but no one can catch him.

Rosa goes back to town in the ambulance and dies one month later in January. Only the idiot, Jim Bond, survives but no one knows where he is.

The final chapter ends as Shreve asks Quentin why he hates the South. Quentin claims that he does not hate it, but his response remains problematic. After he has spoken the words, "I don't hate it," the negative refrain rings in his mind five times: "I don't hate it he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!" (378).

From this brief summary, it can be seen that the novel's plot appears to move backwards from effect to cause as the chronological scheme moves from the present to the past, going further back into the past as the novel's present tense advances. From the beginning it is known that Henry Sutpen killed Charles Bon in 1865. The basic outline of events from Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson, Mississippi, in 1833 to his death in 1869 is given in the early pages of the novel and repeated throughout as each narrator summarizes what is known. What is not known until chapter seven is anything about Thomas Sutpen's life prior to 1833. This information is not revealed until a new location and new present tense occurs in the novel. Quentin, removed from his father's and Rosa's talking in both time and space, begins to take charge of the narrative by telling his Harvard roommate, Shreve, what his father said. The information concerning Sutpen's past becomes a pivotal point in Quentin and Shreve's re-creation of the old material in chapter eight.

Rosa had begun the narration of past events by emphasizing the point that Sutpen was a man without a past who refused to say anything at all about who his father was or where he came from. Rosa pictures Sutpen as "erupting," god-like, from no known parents in a "thunderclap" upon a peaceful scene in Jefferson, Mississippi on a Sunday in 1833. As Mr. Compson continues the narration, not only is Sutpen's unknown origin stressed, but so too is Charles Bon's. Mr. Compson says that when Bon appeared in Mississippi in 1859 he was "a young man of worldly elegance and assurance beyond his years, handsome, apparently wealthy and with for background the shadowy figure of a legal guardian rather than any parents--a personage who in the remote Mississippi of that time must have appeared almost phoenix-like, fullsprung from no childhood born of no woman and impervious to time" (A 74).

Sutpen first appears in Jefferson when he is about twenty-five, and Bon appears when he is in his mid-twenties, "a little too old to even be in college." Both Sutpen and Bon become curiosities because no one knows anything about their past, which for those Southerners of the time meant no one knew who their fathers were. The narrative search through past events to discover the truth behind Charles Bon's murder, then, also entails a search to discover the identity of the father. When Sutpen's past is finally revealed in chapter seven, his father is identified as a poor white, or "nobody." In Sutpen's attempt to escape his origin, he ironically ends up having a son, who for some reason known only to Sutpen, must remain a "nobody" or an unknown. The fact that Sutpen had a son,

although no one knows the name of that son or even if Sutpen ever named him, becomes a key element in Quentin and Shreve's creation of events in which they supply the unknown Bon with a known father, Thomas Sutpen.

As the novel progresses, it appears that not only did Rosa "get the picture by the first word, the name Charles Bon" (A 75), as Mr. Compson suggests in explaining Rosa's vicarious attraction to Bon, but so too do Quentin and Shreve since all of the narrators appear to be attracted to the "curious" name, Bon. A major element in Quentin and Shreve's version of the story rests on the belief that Sutpen did name his first son, and when Henry first introduced Bon, Sutpen immediately suspected that Bon was his son, although Sutpen never gives this impression to anyone. The evidence for this assumption is based on the knowledge of the relative position of three events within a year's span. First, it is known that Bon appeared at Sutpen's Hundred with Henry during the Christmas of 1859. Second, it is known that Sutpen went to New Orleans during the summer following that first Christmas visit, and third, Henry repudiated his birthright and left for New Orleans with Bon during the Christmas of 1860. From this arrangement of events, it is assumed that Sutpen went to New Orleans, not on business as previously thought, but specifically to verify his suspicions concerning Charles Bon. Sutpen, a man who was known to wait for nothing, then waited to see if Bon would return. When Bon returned with Henry the following Christmas, Sutpen informed Henry that Charles Bon was his brother. Unable to accept the "truth" from his father, possibly because the information

came from his father first before he was told by Bon, or possibly just because his father knew something before he did, Henry repudiated his birthright and left for New Orleans with Bon. According to Shreve and Quentin, the truth is that Henry went to see Bon's octoroon mother, not Bon's octoroon wife as Mr. Compson thought. However, what remains a fact in the novel is that General Compson did see the octoroon woman with Bon's son while no one ever saw Bon's mother. Although Shreve and Quentin attempt to create a picture of Bon's mother, based on the "outraged female vindictiveness" of Rosa, and create a villainous character as Bon's legal guardian, the third-person narrator intrudes on their creations by remarking that these people possibly "never existed anywhere at all." Consequently, Quentin and Shreve's attempts to identify Bon by identifying his father and mother may culminate in a good story, but not exactly "the truth."

The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the reasons surrounding the narrative's failure to establish the truth concerning the events which it presents. Chapter One will concentrate on the gaps in Quentin and Shreve's version of the story since critics have consistently assumed that their reconstruction of events is what Faulkner intended as the truth. Critical efforts to find the textual evidence which supports Quentin's retrieval of the two missing facts, that Charles Bon was Sutpen's son by his first wife and that he was cast off along with his mother because they were black, will be discussed. It will be argued, however, that the evidence which supports Quentin's "facts" exists nowhere in the text, forcing

Quentin's assignation of the motives of incest and miscegenation to the murder to appear more like an invention than a discovery of the truth. Further, it will be argued that Faulkner purposely chose to delete the material which would support the truth of Quentin's account so that all of the versions would remain suspect. By making all of the narrative interpretations suspect, Faulkner allows his novel to become a "test" of truths rather than a quest for the absolute truth. Such a maneuver by Faulkner only adds to the brilliancy of his innovative technique in Absalom. Faulkner's refusal to close his text by supplying all the parts which could easily be summed up into a whole is what has engaged readers' attention over the decades and is what will open his text to modern critical theory in the future.

Chapters Two and Three will examine the "truths" which Faulkner tests in Absalom according to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, with whom Faulkner has expressed agreement. It will be shown that the "truths" which Absalom test, are mankind's faulty assumptions concerning time and reality. The failure of the narrators to know the truth behind the past events, and the failure of Absalom's characters to gain viable knowledge of their existence, can be attributed to what Bergson has described as the intellect's interference with the absolute knowledge of reality. Bergson argues that a grasp of all aspects of reality, including time, is obscured by the intellect's tendency to superimpose mental constructs onto the real object or thing, and in the process, the intellect attempts to know the real thing in terms of something other than itself.

Chapter Two will investigate the characters' and narrators' failure to know the reality of time. It will be argued that their failure is the result of confusing time, as Bergson argues, with the mental constructs of math, space and language. A brief summary of philosophical attempts, beginning with Aristotle, to know time by using these constructs will support Bergson's major contention that all of these constructs contribute to a faulty misapprehension of the reality of time, its continuous nature. As Bergson points out, these constructs attempt to render the continual transition of time, which brings about change, as a sum of artificial stops or positions in space. Using specific points in Bergson's philosophy, it will be demonstrated that the reason for the narrators' failure to account for the truth behind the whole duration of events is because all of the factual evidence available to them is embedded in a knowledge of time based on notions of spatial extensity, primarily the knowledge of an object's or event's relative positioning to another.

Chapter Three will examine the failure in the individual lives of Absalom's characters. It will be shown that the confusion and violence which erupts throughout Absalom is the result of their faulty intellectual approaches to reality in which they attempt to identify the "whole thing" by a single part or attribute, or substitute a particular mental construct, idea, or symbol for the real thing. Although the interpretations in this chapter proceed from Bergson's major metaphysical points, support from later theorists in psychology and linguistics, consistent with Bergson, will be added.

One of Bergson's major metaphysical contentions is that the intellectual approach to knowledge only yields a partial or relative knowledge of the whole, absolute object, or thing, and such knowledge leads into falsely identifying the real thing by one or more of its attributes or parts. Chapter Three will demonstrate that this false identification process pervades the thinking of Faulkner's characters in Absalom and accounts for the violence which erupts throughout the novel as individuals attempt "to use" one another with their thought processes rather than "know" one another through intuition. Absalom demonstrates that just such a faulty logic is a primary factor in the mechanisms of society which identifies its members according to a single attribute, or a few attributes selected by its most powerful members. The entire racial problem which arises in Absalom is the result of society's intellectual approach to its members which fails to recognize the individual in terms of who he or she is, but in terms of a single attribute which is compared or contrasted to another individual for purposes of identification.

Chapter Three will also cover another problem which is central to Absalom and accounts for some of the faulty social processes, the problem of language. Bergson was one of the first modern thinkers to stress the failure of language to render reality, and thereby led the way not only to Absalom's concern with the problem of language, but also to the twentieth century's preoccupation with the question of language. The problem of language becomes central to Absalom because Thomas Sutpen suggests that it was his failure to

understand the language which led to his mistake of marrying a woman who was not suitable for his purposes. The whole problem with language also becomes apparent in all the characters' tendency to trust the word more than the reality which the word symbolizes. Rosa is particularly attracted to the power of the word because it allows her to create a reality preferable to the world in which she lives. Her "demonizing" of Sutpen allows her to "re-present" a series of events which would prove her right and Sutpen wrong. However, her forty-three years of frustration result from her substitution of the word for the real. Like Rosa, all of Absalom's characters fail in their attempts to secure a viable existence because they continually cling to the concept or symbol while denying the changing reality which surrounds them.

It can be seen, then, that Absalom's failure to account for the truth behind its narrative has opened the text to some of the most important issues in modern thought and assured its continual interest in the eyes of modern critics. Ironically, the significance of the novel has outlasted the traditional critical theory which first catapulted it to fame. The early critics recognized a brilliancy in Faulkner's innovative narrative style which rendered time as experienced rather than artificially plotted along a linear segment. They also recognized that Faulkner's use of multiple narrators in Absalom was an ingenious creative display. Although they noted that the use of multiple narrators combined with a disrupted linear chronology appeared difficult, they were certain that they could establish that the novel could be termed "good" in the Aristotelian sense of "good

art." Consequently they set about to argue that all of the pieces of the story were available in the text and could be added together to demonstrate that the novel was a complete whole with an easily detected center around which all of the novel's elements revolved. It took several generations of critics to argue that no novel was a closed system and that its gaps could be more easily detected than its center. A "good" work, then, no longer has to fill the criterion that all of its parts can be added together to produce a unified whole. Consequently, the suspicions that Absalom had too many gaps in its material to account for its whole literary truth is no longer hushed or glossed over, but rather has become a springboard for modern critical theory. The fact that the novel is "good," however, needs no support from theory but is validated by the continual interest shown by readers and critics since its first publication on October 26, 1936.

The concluding chapter of this dissertation will establish that not only does Absalom fail to render an absolute truth, or in Bergson's words, a single "clear idea" of the whole thing," but neither do many of Faulkner's other works. An examination of construction of The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, and Light in August will show that Faulkner tended to employ the use of multiple perspectives, or conflicting parts, which fail to coalesce into a whole, absolute view, or establish a single prevailing idea which would unify the whole. It appears, then, that in these novels as well as other works, Faulkner was responding to Bergson's call upon philosophers to free men's minds from the fetters of Platonism by showing that no external point of view of the "thing itself"

could ever render a grasp of reality in its absolute. In spite of the limits of language, which by its very nature is an abstraction, Bergson suggested that we could come closer to representing the "thing as it is" through flowing images which would intimate moving reality. However, since any words, images, or concepts are insufficient for rendering the real, Bergson suggested that these images should be as contradictory as possible in order to propel the mind into a "tension" which would open the way to intuition. Just such a tension among images, or tension among ideas, seems to characterize Faulkner's works in general, a fact which has led to continual critical attempts to close Faulkner's works by establishing the one "clear idea" which would resolve the tensions. It becomes apparent, however, that Faulkner did not want to resolve his tensions; this is the major reason, for example, that he chose not to include the facts of Charles Bon's heritage in Absalom. What is most likely is that Faulkner, like Bergson, did not wish to resolve his apparent tensions because he wanted to demonstrate that no one clear idea could ever "hold" all of life's experiences. Further, Faulkner's most failed, or "doomed," characters tend to support this point. Their failure rests in their attempts to put a "hold" on life by abstracting dominating or determining ideas from the flow of moving reality. Their adherence to these ideas submit them to feelings of repetition which, as Bergson argues, are only products or illusions of the intellect. Their "fix" on life also is accompanied by their intellectual perceptions of time which, Bergson demonstrates, lead to a confusion of time with notions of math and space.

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEMATIC TRUTH

In Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner demonstrated that at least four people, his principal narrators Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin and Shreve, could become so preoccupied with getting to the truth about past events that their sole actions over the novel's duration consisted of nothing but listening to and talking about the bits and pieces of the Sutpen legend. Since the novel's appearance, far more critics than Faulkner could have conceived of as narrators for his tale have also joined in the search for the truth about the Sutpen story, sorting through the pages of Absalom to piece the facts together and settle the matter once and for all. In spite of the ingenious efforts of the critics as well as Faulkner's own narrators, the truth remains elusive and the story defies closure. The fact is that there are too many gaps in the Sutpen material to satisfy the question which the novel ostensibly seeks to answer, why did Henry Sutpen kill Charles Bon?

The Gerald Langford study of Faulkner's manuscript shows that Faulkner purposefully chose to delete the parts from his original text that would support the truth of Quentin's version of the story, which is dependent on the missing facts that Charles Bon was indeed Thomas Sutpen's son by his first marriage and was renounced along with his mother because of black blood. The Langford study shows that the words enclosed in parentheses in the following quote were struck from the original:

'Yes,' Quentin said. '[Sutpen] Sitting in grandfather's office that p.m. (and telling him how he never found out until after Bon was born that the mother that they had told him was a Spaniard had some nigger blood). . . .' (Faulkner quoted in Langford 12)

Faulkner deleted another passage from the original which also revealed that Bon was Sutpen's son. It read:

' . . . and so he (grandfather) believed that he knew all that Sutpen could know; that Bon might decide at any moment to defy Henry and come to Judith and that when he did so Judith would marry him half brother or no.' (Faulkner quoted in Langford 11)

In spite of the Langford findings, critics, including Langford himself, have consistently attempted to find textual evidence to verify Quentin's account, apparently clinging to the assumption that since Quentin's account was positioned last in the novel, Quentin's "last word" must be what Faulkner intended as "the truth." However, if Faulkner struck out the passages in his manuscript that supported the truth of Quentin's version he must have wanted Quentin's account to remain suspect, a fact supported by his response to a questioner at the University of Virginia. The questioner asked Faulkner which of his narrators "held the right view" and Faulkner answered "no one," adding that "the old man [Sutpen] was himself a little too big for people no greater in stature than Quentin, and Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson to see" (273). Rather than determining the truth about the Sutpen story, Faulkner's narrators appear to

reveal more about themselves than the characters whom they discuss, a point noted by André Bleikasten (138). Further, as they search through past events to find an answer for Henry's killing of Charles, they also, as Richard Adams has suggested, appear to be groping for some truth about themselves in the present more than establishing a truth about the past (Motion 173). Consequently, the novel's opening question concerning past events may not hold priority or lie at the center of the novel. The fact is that the novel's "truth" has escaped detection since it first appeared in print, since readers, like Faulkner's students at the University of Virginia, have been unable to answer exactly "just whose story is Absalom's?" (Faulkner in the Univ. 274)

In 1954 the formidable American critic, Cleanth Brooks, cited Absalom as Faulkner's best work but also noted that the work was Faulkner's most problematic. At one point Brooks even declared that the novel was constructed through an "almost willful complication of plot" ("History" 201), but ultimately affirmed that Absalom was the most "brilliantly written of all Faulkner's novels" (203). Brooks added that the "intensity" of the book was a "function of the structure" which "deferred and suspended the resolutions" of the novel (203). Although the word "problematic" would not appear in criticism until Vladimir Propp discussed a novel's "problematic beginnings," Brooks did say "admittedly, the novel is a difficult one [but] it is the price that has to be paid by the reader for the novel's power and significance" (203). Even if Faulkner's complicated narrative proved "brilliant but difficult," Brooks along with the early critics were

certain of establishing the novel's "significance" as well as locating the thematic center. Brooks declared that the "significance" of the novel "was deeply entrenched in Southern history" ("History" 197), and referred his readers to The Burden of Southern History by the well-known Southern historian, C. Vann Woodward. Brooks concluded that Absalom, like Woodward's history, was concerned with "the burdens of Southern past," which included its "experiences of evil as well as tragedy" ("History" 197). Another important critic from the new school of criticism, Robert Penn Warren, also saw Faulkner's technique as well as subject matter developing out of the "burden of the Southern past." Warren claimed,

As a technician, Faulkner, except for his peers, Melville and James, is the most profound experimenter in the novel that America has produced. But the experiments were developed out of--that is, were not merely applied to--an anguishing research into the Southern past and the implications of that past. (5)

Warren, like Brooks, assumed that in spite of the ambiguous and enigmatic, Faulkner implied a "moral reality beneath the crust of history" (2) and that a specific "moral truth" lay at the center of Absalom. For Brooks, it was Sutpen's moral "innocence" which was the determining cause of the tragic events (Yoknapatawpha 296).

Later critics in the critical mode of Northrop Frye began to interpret Absalom as a mythic construct, certain that all narratives were constructed

around a definable and recognizable category of myth. Recognizing that Faulkner's unusual narrative technique seemed purposely to distort the linear progression of chronology while blurring the distinction between the past and present, they noted that Ernst Cassirer, in his definitive study, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, had defined mythic thought in a manner which seemed to describe Faulkner's narrative style. Cassirer had stated,

The stages of time--past, present, future--do not remain distinct; once and over again the mythical consciousness succumbs to the tendency and temptation to level the differences and ultimately transform them into a pure identity. The magical "now" is laden with the past and pregnant with the future. (2:111)

Assuming that Absalom's technique indicated a mythical mode, critics began to assert that the "truth" of the novel was mythic and attempted to prove that the pattern of Absalom fell into a particular mythic structure as "the myth of the fall" (Adams, Motion 172, Bjork 196-204, Hoffman 75-78, Hunt 9, O'Donnell 49), "the myth of succession" (Kartiganer, "Myth," 357-64), or "the myth of the South" (Adams, "myth of South" 131-37, Sullivan 552, Swiggart 27, Tate 160-4). Yet it became obvious that no specific myth seemed to satisfy the scope of the entire novel and too many questions remained. One of the largest problems was that the identification of a particular mythic pattern in Absalom depended on the truth of Quentin's version which appeared logically problematic. However,

Cassirer had explained that the mythic grasp of truth was contradistinctive to the logical grasp of truth. Cassirer explained:

For the mythical consciousness, the impression is not merely relative but absolute. It manifests and confirms its presence by the irresistible force with which it impresses itself upon consciousness. Whereas scientific thought takes an attitude of inquiry and doubt toward the "object" with its claim to objectivity and necessity, myth knows no such opposition. It "has" the object only insofar as it is overpowered by it. . . . It has no will to understand the object by encompassing it logically and articulating it with a complex of causes and effects; it is simply overpowered by the object. (Cassirer quoted in Brylowski 73-74)

Cassirer had explained that the mythical consciousness grasped truth through an empathic identification with its object rather than approaching the object through logic. Cassirer's explanation of mythic "truth" then appeared to define Quentin's and Shreve's projection of themselves into the youthful Charles and Henry as an act of intuitive identification of the truth. The reader too, then, could grasp the truth of Quentin's version through the mythical mode by standing deeply within the impression being rendered by Quentin's and Shreve's re-creation of events. Recognizing that such a grasp of "truth" was somewhat distinct from our normal usage of the term, Richard Adams did admit that the novel was "aimed at developing a literary rather than literal truth" (180).

However, problems still remained with affirming the "truth" of the Sutpen Story by the mythical mode. Rosa's version also seemed mythic and possibly the most "mythic" of all. There was no doubt that she was "overpowered by her object," Sutpen, whom she represented as a mythical "man-horse-demon," and her grasp of the "truth" which revealed to her that he was an "instrument of a curse," surely indicated her refusal "to encompass him logically." Although her version was the most colored by mythic implication, critics agree that her version of the Sutpen story is the most erroneous of all. Further, the mythic approach to truth really could not be recommended since it appeared to render its followers, particularly Quentin, psychically unstable, leaving the seeker certain that he should have "never more of peace." Quentin's reaction to his grasp of the truth also presented another problem. No one seemed to be able to explain why Quentin, who was the most removed from the actual events, was so personally disturbed by his grasp of truth. It took later critics, most notably John T. Irwin, to reverse this cause-effect scenario and suggest that perhaps Quentin's grasp of the truth was the result of a disturbed mind rather than his mind becoming unsettled by a disturbing truth. Such an interpretation is based on the fact that in spite of any "literary truth" Quentin may have created, his actual retrieval of the "literal truth" about the Sutpen characters is missing from the text, a logical gap noted by even the earliest critics.

Brooks' early suggestion that the narrative presented "difficulty" appears to be a supportable fact judging by the plethora of continuing criticism attempting,

like Floyd Watkins, to show "What Happens in Absalom, Absalom!" These critics, in an effort to prove closure in the novel, have argued that the text supplies the information leading to Quentin's discovery, yet the fact remains that nowhere in the novel is there any evidence which supports the truth of Quentin's version. Brooks had noted very early that Quentin's knowledge of the two important missing factors in the story, that Sutpen repudiated his first wife because she was part black and that Charles Bon was Sutpen's son, was lacking from the text. Brooks declared that "the whole logic of Absalom argues that only through the presence of Henry in the house did Quentin gain access to the dark secrets of the Sutpen tragedy" ("History" 199), a "fact" assumed by many readers. However, Brooks himself pointed out that nothing is established in the short exchange of dialogue between Henry and Quentin provided in the text except the identity of Henry in the house ("and you are--? Henry Sutpen") (A 373). Admitting that the exchange of words given in the text as factual fails to reveal any information about Bon, Brooks suggested that it was possible that Henry told Rosa and Rosa told Quentin on the ride home, but Brooks maintained that it was Henry who told Quentin "the truth" although Faulkner never lets the reader see Henry doing so.

Still searching for the verification of Quentin's version, critics have turned to other areas of the text aside from Quentin's meeting with Henry. Gerald Langford and Floyd Watkins have argued that it was General Compson who knew that Sutpen had put aside his first wife because of her racial heritage and

that General Compson told his grandson, Quentin, but not his son, Quentin's father. Both base their arguments on a comment made by Quentin as he relates Sutpen's meeting with General Compson to whom Sutpen had come to explore the need for a second choice to be made in order to save his "design." Quentin tells Shreve that all the time Sutpen spoke, Grandfather listened, "not knowing what choice he was talking about even, what second choice he was faced with until the very last word he [Sutpen] spoke before [he left]" (A 272). These critics assume that the "last word" Sutpen spoke was "nigger," throwing the word out to General Compson as a final explanation for his problems arising from his repudiation of his first wife and child. Langford and Watkins also believe that Sutpen had directly implied to General Compson thirty years earlier that the wife who he thought was a Spaniard was black "when he flipped the joker out of the deck" by interrupting his tale about the Haitian uprising and suddenly mentioning that his father-in-law's wife had been a Spaniard. However, such a reading is founded on a speculation and not a fact. Further, the substitution of the word "nigger" for "last word" is based on a comprehension of the sentence as meaning that Sutpen named the factor in the last word he spoke which made him put aside his wife and son, rather than understanding the sentence to mean that even by the end of the last word which Sutpen spoke, Grandfather never understood what Sutpen was talking about. Obviously the latter reading must be the meaning intended by the use of "last word" because the passage continues with "so that Grandfather did not even say 'I don't know which you should choose'

not because that was all he could have said and so to say that would be less than no answer . . ." (A 272). Further, Quentin, who has used this phrase to explain his grandfather's lack of understanding, had told Shreve some pages earlier that his father did not know about Charles Bon because "grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told grandfather quite all of it" (A 266). It appears, then, that General Compson could not have told his grandson the "truth" about Sutpen's repudiation of his first wife because he did not know it. Grandfather Compson also explains that Sutpen would not "malign the memory" of his first wife by naming the factor which made him cast her aside. Consequently we surely cannot assume that Sutpen uttered the word "nigger" to Grandfather Compson as an explanation for his problems.

The question remains then, from whom did Quentin learn the truth? Carl E. Rollyson has argued that Quentin learned the truth about Bon from Clytie. It is Shreve who suggests that Quentin received the truth from Clytie, yet the claim that Clytie "tells all" remains unsupportable, for Quentin never affirms Shreve's contention. In chapter six of the novel, as Quentin relates to Shreve all that "Father said" about the Sutpen affair, he tells Shreve that Mr. Compson believed that Sutpen must have "named them [of his children] all--the Charles Goods and the Clytemnestras and Henry and Judith--that entire fecundity of dragon's teeth as father called it" (A 266). Shreve is somewhat puzzled by Mr. Compson's inclusion of the name Charles Bon in the list of Sutpen children since Mr. Compson never seemed to know that Charles Bon was Sutpen's son. Shreve says

to Quentin, "Your father, he seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick after having waited forty-five years. . . . who told him?" (A 266). At this point Quentin very matter of factly says, "I did--the day after we [Rosa and Quentin] after that night when we--[went out to the old plantation]" (A 266).

Where and when Quentin learned the truth about Charles Bon seems to be established in this conversation between Shreve and Quentin; Quentin found out the truth the night he accompanied Rosa to the ruined Sutpen home. However, it is not until chapter eight that Shreve suggests that Quentin finds out the truth from Clytie, but this suggestion is just as problematic as the belief that Henry revealed the missing facts. Shreve, attempting to reconstruct Quentin's discovery, tells Quentin:

And so you and the old dame, the Aunt Rosa, went out there that night and the old nigger Clytie tried to stop you, stop her [Rosa]; she held your arm and said, 'Don't let her go up there, young marster'. . . and you couldn't stop her either and then you saw that Clytie's trouble wasn't anger nor even distrust; it was terror, fear. And she didn't tell you in so many words because she was still keeping that secret for the sake of the man who had been her father too as well as for the sake of the family which no longer existed, . . . didn't tell you in so many words anymore than she told you in so many words how she had been in the room that day when

they brought Bon's body in and Judith took from his pocket the metal case she had given him with her picture in it; she didn't tell you, it just came out of the terror and the fear ; . . . and she didn't tell you in the actual words because even in the terror she kept the secret; nevertheless she told you, or at least all of a sudden you knew--. (A 350-51)

What becomes apparent here is that Shreve is fishing for an explanation of how Quentin knew the "truth" about Charles Bon. Shreve believes that Quentin found out from Clytie, yet even in his own reconstruction of Quentin's meeting with Clytie she "never says the words." Rather, Shreve thinks that Quentin just looked at Clytie's face and "knew," but Quentin never affirms Shreve's account. After Shreve stops talking the narrative continues with the comment, "It was just as well [that Shreve stopped talking], since he had no listener" (A 351).

At this point in the novel an imaginative passage occurs in which Quentin and Shreve envision Sutpen informing Henry of Charles' black heritage and Henry's subsequent refusal to allow Charles' marriage to Judith because of this factor. Many critics have assumed that this passage is the intended presentation of the "truth" because it is the "last word" given on the Sutpen story. The passage ends chapter eight and the final chapter reveals no more information about the Sutpen characters, only Quentin's reaction to his own creation of events. In one of the latest critical attempts to prove closure in the novel, Dirk Kuyk has argued that this imaginative passage, which he terms the "bonfire passage" because it

begins with the smell of the smoke from the bivouac fires during the Civil War, is authenticated by the Faulkner third person narrator, who, as Kuyk notes, begins every chapter except for Rosa's account in chapter five, which he ends. Kuyk also notes that the third person, Faulkner narrator, checks or "reins in" all of the narrators' interpretations including Quentin's and Shreve's romanticized starts in the beginning of chapter eight. However, the "bonfire passage" which ends Quentins and Shreve's account, claims Kuyk, is not Quentin's and Shreve's but rather reported by the Faulkner narrator himself. Although the third person Faulkner narrator intersperses the narrative with comments which cast doubt on the narrators' interpretations, particularly Quentin's and Shreve's, there is no reason to suspect that the bonfire passage which appears in italics is reported by Faulkner himself or even validated by the third person narrator. Rather the bonfire passage is, as Carl Rollyson has noted, "essentially an extension and heightening of what Quentin and Shreve have already been imagining" (42). The use of italics throughout the novel most often occurs when a narrator stops talking or a hearer quits listening and begins to think about or picture what has just been said, and this is precisely what happens in the "bonfire passage." Quentin and Shreve stop talking about how Quentin found out about Bon's heritage and both begin to imagine how and when Sutpen told Henry about Bon; they also try to imagine what followed between Henry and Charles after Sutpen told Henry that Bon was black. To indicate that this passage is the result of the combined effort of the two present day youths, Quentin and Shreve, who identify

with the two youths of the past, Henry and Charles, the bonfire passage begins with the same doubling effect of characters which had begun the chapter. In the opening of chapter eight, as Quentin and Shreve discuss the Sutpen story, the third person narrator says that "there was not two of them but four" (A 294) as Shreve and Quentin imagine Bon's Christmas visit to Sutpen's hundred and Henry's repudiation of his father which had occurred "sixty years ago" (A 294). The closing of chapter eight, the bonfire passage, ends the chapter in the manner in which it had begun. Quentin and Shreve stop talking about the Sutpen story in their present day college room and begin to imagine the events of the past:

Because now neither of them was there [in the Harvard room].

They were both in Carolina and the time was forty-six years ago, and it was not even four now but compounded still further, since now both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon, compounded each of both yet either neither, smelling the very smoke which had blown and faded away forty-six years ago from the [italics begin at this point] *bivouac fires burning in a pine grove . . .* .(A 351)

The italicized passage, which reveals that Sutpen informed Henry of Charles' black blood during a break in the fighting during the Civil War, is the ending of what Quentin and Shreve had begun in chapter six when Shreve requested a story about the South "better than Ben Hur." Taking what had been said about the characters from the past and adding their own inventions, the two

attempt to re-tell the Sutpen story together, accepting some of each other's creations but often stopping one another with such comments as Quentin's "wait I tell you! . . . I'm telling [it]" (A 277), and Shreve's "No. You let me play awhile now" (A 280). The bonfire passage is the agreed upon ending of the story which the two set out to create. However, the Faulkner narrator never authenticates their version, and the warning that Shreve and Quentin's version is just another interpretation of past events is the strongest intrusion of the third person narrator in the entire novel. At one point the third person narrator declares that the creation of the lawyer and Bon's mother is "true enough," but his comments indicate that Quentin's and Shreve's conception of the "truth" is "literary not literal," for he describes their combined creative efforts as,

. . . both thinking as one, . . . the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere. . . . (A 303)

In the beginning of chapter eight, which ends with the bonfire passage, the Faulkner narrator warns that what is about to be told is embroidered by the desires of youth. He relates to the reader that both Shreve and Quentin are thinking about Bon's Christmas visits to the Sutpen plantation where the romance between Bon and Judith must have bloomed. Quentin and Shreve picture Bon and Judith strolling in the garden among the shrubs "starred with white bloom--jasmine, spiraea, honeysuckle, perhaps myriad scentless unpickable Cherokee roses" (A 295). Hardly giving the reader time to note that such a

vision of "blooming love" must surely be more literary than literal since it was in the dead of winter, the Faulkner narrator intrudes on the boys' telling of the story with the comment that,

It would not matter here in Cambridge that the time had been winter in that garden too, and hence no bloom nor leaf even if there had been someone to walk there and be seen there since, judged by subsequent events, it had been night in the garden also. But that did not matter because it had been so long ago. It did not matter to them (Quentin and Shreve) anyway, who could without moving, as free now of flesh as the father who decreed and forbade [Sutpen]; the son [Henry] who denied and repudiated; the lover [Charles] who acquiesced, the beloved [Judith] who was not bereaved [could pass over the flesh and the physical in order to] hold honor above slothly unregret and love above fat and easy shame. (A 295)

We are warned, then, by the Faulkner narrator that the two youths of the present, Shreve and Quentin, are about to tell a story colored by the ideals and desires of the young, using the youthful characters of the past, Henry, Charles, and Judith, to reconstruct a story in which,

. . . it did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking

and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other--faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived (A 316)

The Faulkner narrator warns here that facts will be shuffled to "fit the preconceived." There is no doubt that Shreve wants to begin a romantic story colored by "moonlight and magnolia." The re-creation of the young, gallant Charles Bon, whom Mr. Compson called "the most curious of them all," smacks of a cheap romantic fiction. In Quentin and Shreve's account, Charles, the hero, challenges the villain lawyer to a duel after the villain utters uncouth words about the beloved, Judith. The lawyer-villain has engineered the whole meeting between Charles and the Sutpens in hopes of blackmailing Sutpen while stealing Bon's mother's money. To prove that youth is honorable and holds "love above slothy unregret," the three young people, Henry, Charles and Judith, wrestle with their consciences while deferring their desires because of their love for one another. Charles waits "in fairness and honor" (A 341) for recognition from his father, Judith patiently waits four years for her marriage proposal to materialize, and Henry waits to forbid the marriage between the two whom he loves the most. In Quentin's and Shreve's story, Bon rescues the fallen Henry although Mr. Compson had said that it was Bon, not Henry, who was shot, a piece of

information the truth of which is never known. Shreve and Quentin also alter another piece of the story concerning Judith's picture frame. Both boys believe that Charles substituted the picture of his octoroon mistress for the one of Judith's so that when Judith finds Charles dead with another woman's picture in her frame, she will not grieve. However, we never know whose picture is in the frame, only that Rosa saw Judith holding a picture frame like the one which had encased her own picture and which Miss Rosa assumed that Judith had exchanged with Charles Bon for a picture of him. All that Rosa knows is that she saw Judith holding that picture frame after Bon was shot and that Judith did not appear to grieve. Consequently, we never know if Bon substituted Judith's picture with the octoroon's, or even if he did so, why? As Ilse Lind has pointed out (904), if Bon made the exchange it is just as likely that he did so as an act of defiance rather than as a heroic gesture of love, making Bon less gallant and less honorable than Shreve and Quentin imagined.

With so many narrators attempting to reconstruct the events of the Sutpen story and filling in the gaps with their own inventions, it becomes difficult, as Cleanth Brooks asserts, to separate facts from fiction. Just as Faulkner has warned that his narrators will shuffle parts "to fit the preconceived," so too have critics who, as Estella Schoenberg has noted, have read facts and motivation into a story which are missing (129). Most critics believe that Quentin's and Shreve's version has neatly tied up the loose ends of the Sutpen material by supplying facts and sufficient motives for the chain of events surrounding the killing of

Charles Bon. However, a further reflection on the Quentin version still fails to explain how Bon, particularly if he were black, could be a threat to Sutpen. As James Guetti has asserted, "What is truly inexplicable here is that Bon seems to pose no literal threat whatever to the design [and consequently] Sutpen's refusal to recognize Bon in any way seems insane, out of all proportion to what we suppose are the facts" (122). Brooks also has pointed out that Bon's racial heritage could not threaten Sutpen's desire to establish a dynasty because as a black Bon would have no legal rights (Toward Yoknapatawpha 298). Kuyk, in agreement with Brooks, also notes that Bon could not threaten Sutpen with his intention to marry Judith because such a marriage would have been illegal for reasons of incest as well as miscegenation (14). Further, as Kuyk suggests, the intended marriage could not threaten Sutpen because, although a daughter's "scandalous behavior" might evoke social opprobrium, it would not threaten a dynasty in a patriarchal society as the South was at the time (14).

With so many questions surrounding the threat which Bon supposedly poses to Sutpen, Quentin's and Shreve's version of the story becomes suspect. Most importantly, however, one of the central questions which the text never clears up is whether or not Charles Bon is really Sutpen's son by his first marriage. We are told by Mr. Compson that nobody ever knew if Judith knew that Bon was her brother or if Bon ever knew Sutpen was his father, and most assuredly Sutpen never hints to anyone that Bon is his son. Estella Schoenberg argues that an important piece of evidence in the text reveals that Charles Bon

was not Sutpen's son and this evidence is the inscription placed by Judith on Bon's tombstone (81). The inscription states that Bon was born in 1831 in New Orleans, not Haiti where Sutpen's first son had been born. Schoenberg remarks that we might assume that Judith lied about Bon's place of birth, but then we would have to question why since there is no apparent motivation for her doing so. Judith also drops another piece of information regarding Bon, which suggests that Bon's intending bigamy, as Mr. Compson believed, may have been the reason for Henry's killing of Bon. Rosa reports that when they buried the body Judith remarked, "He was a Catholic. Do any of you all know how Catholics-- [bury their dead]?" (A 152). If it is true that Bon was a Catholic and married to the mother of his son, then his religion would forbid divorce. As Cleanth Brooks has noted, even if Quentin's information concerning Bon's heritage is true, the exact motive for Henry's killing of Bon is not given in the text (Toward Yoknapatawpha 302).

A piece of information dropped by Sutpen suggests that the son of Sutpen's first wife may not even have been Sutpen's at all. While there is a break in the hunt for the escaped architect, Sutpen amazes Grandfather Compson with the fact that it was a part of his "design" to remain a virgin until his marriage, a fact re-emphasized by Shreve's remark, "and all you called him was just a virgin!" (A 255). As Schoenberg suggests, the failure to be a virgin may have been the fault of the first wife of Sutpen's, who, like Caddy in The Sound and the Fury, was pregnant with another man's child when she married

(81). Schoenberg's speculation is somewhat supported by Grandfather Compson's remark that Sutpen's conscience "would not permit the child [by the first marriage], since it was a boy, to bear either his [Sutpen's] name or that of its maternal grandfather, [and his conscience] 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" (A 266). The "customary" was also done for Caddy who was "provided with a quick husband," and it is possible that the virgin Sutpen had fallen victim to this "customary" manoeuver when he was given the daughter of the plantation owner in marriage.

Regardless of these speculations, the largest problem in linking Charles Bon to the identity of the first child resides in the fact that no one seemed to know what Sutpen named that first child or even if he did name the child, a point on which Quentin's version of the story is dependent since it is the "curious" name *Bon* which seems to alert Sutpen and accounts for Sutpen's unknown reason for going to New Orleans. Grandfather Compson believes that Sutpen must have named the first child just as he named the rest of his get, but as Quentin explains to Shreve, "He [Sutpen] didn't tell grandfather that he did" (A 265). Consequently, with so many problems surrounding Bon's supposed threat to Sutpen's "design," coupled with the lack of supportive evidence concerning Bon's identity, Quentin's version of the Sutpen story fails to close the gaps left open by Rosa's and Mr. Compson's previous stories.

The fact that Absalom will reveal no absolute truth is hinted at in the opening pages of the novel as the question of Rosa's motive for choosing Quentin to listen to her tale and accompany her to the old Sutpen house is raised but never satisfactorily answered, even to Quentin himself. When Rosa sends for him, Quentin is "astonished" by the request "which was actually a summons" from a woman "three times his age and whom he had known all his life without having exchanged a hundred words" (A 10). Why Quentin submits to her talking "from a little after two o'clock until almost sundown of the long hot weary dead September afternoon" (A 7) is unclear, especially since he complains throughout the novel that "he has had to listen to too much too long" (A 207, 210, 211, 277, 279), and appears to react with "sullenness and smoldering outrage" (A 181, 218, 255, 280) whenever his father or Shreve want to discuss the story. Rosa tells Quentin that she has sent for him because she understands that he is going to Harvard and may become a writer so she intends to give him a story which might make him some money one day. Quentin, however, thinks, "only she didn't mean that. It's because she wants it told" (A 10). He then believes that Rosa wants to tell the Sutpen story so that "people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War" (A 10). Yet after Quentin hits upon this explanation as the reason for Rosa's sending for him, "almost immediately he decided that neither was this the reason why she had sent the note, and sending it, why to him, since if she had merely wanted it

told, written and even printed, she would not have needed to call in anybody--a woman who even in his (Quentin's) father's youth had already established herself as the town's and the country's poetess laureate" (A 11).

Unable to determine exactly why Rosa sent for him, Quentin puts the question to his father. Mr. Compson explains that Rosa chose Quentin because Grandfather Compson was "the nearest thing to a friend Sutpen ever had in this country," (A 13), and that she might think that Sutpen told Grandfather something about herself and Sutpen, "about that engagement which did not engage" (A 13), a piece of information which might have been handed down to Quentin. Mr. Compson also adds that it was Grandfather Compson who helped Sutpen become established in the area and thus "maybe she considers you partly responsible through heredity for what happened to her and her family through him" (A 13). This last comment, however, appears to be offered by Mr. Compson in ironic jest and although many critics have taken Mr. Compson's comment as the reason for Quentin's involvement, even Quentin is not satisfied with this answer. Immediately after his father's comment, Quentin thinks, "whatever her reason for choosing him, whether it was that or not," (A 13), he was having to endure a long wait to accompany her to the old Sutpen home.

With so much doubt cast on all the possible answers, the reader still wonders why Rosa picked Quentin to tell her story and how she was able to get him to accompany her to discover the "thing" hidden in the house. Possibly Rosa told a story intriguing enough to a young man that he was willing to endure the

long wait to discover the secret. Regardless of the numerous possible reasons offered by the novel, no one answer seems to have satisfied the critics, and the question "Why Quentin?" has become one of the favored subjects of the latest critical efforts to explain the whole novel. Faulkner himself placed Quentin in a central role when questioned by students at the University of Virginia whose story was Absalom's, Sutpen or Quentin's. His response was that the story was Quentin's (Blotner and Gwynn 273). There is no doubt that the tale of one brother who killed another brother to prevent the sister's marriage to a black is Quentin's "story" in the sense that he is the author but it is unclear how the discussion of the Sutpen material becomes Quentin's "autobiography," as Bleikasten (137), Irwin (151), Ross (151), and Wyatt (93) have suggested. Estella Schoenberg reports that in a letter from the Jill Summers Archives, Faulkner wrote that he had chosen Quentin as a narrator "because it is just before he is to commit suicide because of his sister" (Schoenberg 78). Does this comment by Faulkner mean that Absalom explains Quentin's suicide in The Sound and the Fury as Irwin argues ("Dead Father" 155). Even further, does the comment help explain Quentin's unsupported assignation of the motives for Bon's killing in Absalom as Young argues, because the Sutpen material gives Quentin a chance to "create a story in which he can participate vicariously as both brother-seducer and brother-avenger" (83)? Although Quentin in Absalom is consistently haunted by the image of Henry's bursting into his sister's room as she snatches the wedding dress to her unclothed body, a scene, as Estella Schoenberg suggests

reminiscent of his bursting into Caddy's room in The Sound and the Fury, there is no evidence in Absalom to indicate that Quentin was in despair over his desire for incest with his own sister and thus could only believe that incest was the contributing factor for Henry's killing of Charles. Such interpretations reside in the belief that Quentin in Absalom was so emotionally preoccupied with his guilt for being a bad or "dark" brother that he could only understand the forbidden marriage of Judith and certain death of Charles as a result of a dark brother's incestuous desires. Although such an explanation appears to account for Quentin's unreasonable reaction to his own story as well as explain why his guesses about Henry's motivation for the killing are unsupportable, the fact is Absalom never reveals why Quentin is so preoccupied with the Sutpen material or why Rosa selects him to listen to her tale.

Quentin himself appears to indicate that his preoccupation with the Sutpen story is because of his "twenty years heritage of breathing the same air [as Sutpen] and hearing his father talk about the man Sutpen" (A 11). The Faulkner narrator informs us that Quentin had grown up with the Sutpen legend: "the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad; . . . his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names [such that] he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts" (A 12). Regardless of this sense of an "hereditary absorption" of the Sutpen story, aside from the names, Quentin seems to know amazingly little about them until his father talks to him on the porch as they wait for it to

become dark enough for Quentin to accompany Rosa to the old house to discover the thing which Rosa had promised was hidden inside. Although Estella Schoenberg has argued that Quentin creates his motives for the murder of Bon "out of thin air" (136), the idea of both the incest and miscegenation are suggested by Mr. Compson's talk. As Quentin "listens to Father talk," he receives a piece of information about Clytie which is hard to believe that he did not know earlier since he claims that he has heard so much about the Sutpen story that he is sick of the hearing. At one point during the talking Mr. Compson tells Quentin about Clytie's parentage. He explains, "Yes, Clytie was his [Sutpen's] daughter too" (A 61), and it appears that for the first time Quentin learns that Clytie is Sutpen's half-black daughter. In a manner which suggests Quentin's surprise at this news, Mr. Compson adds, "Miss Rosa didn't tell you that two of the niggers in the wagon that day [the day Sutpen arrived in Jefferson with his slaves] were women?" (A 61). Quentin answers his father with "No Sir," a response which indicates that he was never aware of Clytie's mixed racial heritage. It appears, then, that Quentin takes this surprise piece of information about a part black Sutpen child and, as the Faulkner narrator has noted, finds the "names interchangeable." From what Quentin has learned about Clytie, he supplies the notion of miscegenation to the "curious existence" of the first Sutpen child, the son which Mr. Compson tells Quentin was "the one before Clytie and Henry and Judith" (A 62), and whose name is unknown, although Mr. Compson is sure that Sutpen named that one too. However, since Mr. Compson

knew of the existence of one black Sutpen child, Clytie, and passed this information on to Quentin, it is suspicious that the idea of the first child being black only occurred to Quentin. As Estella Schoenberg has remarked (84), if Quentin's invention of Bon's black blood were true, it is just unbelievable that those Southerners before Quentin's time would not even have conceived of this idea long before it occurred to Quentin. Such a suspicion seems justified because it is apparent that neither Mr. Compson nor General Compson were oblivious to the mixing between races, although both were aware that such relations were neither socially nor legally recognized. Not only was the possibility of miscegenation recognized by those Southerners before Quentin, but so too was the possibility of incest, the other "surprise" factor of Bon's existence offered by Quentin. The incest motive is planted in Quentin's mind by his father's comment that Grandfather Compson, "who knew more than the rest of the town [knew about the Sutpen affairs]" (A 200), first assumed that the strange little boy (Charles Etienne St. Velery Bon) cared for by Judith and Clytie might be Clytie's, "got by its father on the body of his own daughter" (A 201).

The fact that Mr. Compson seems more aware of the sexual relations between the blacks and whites than his son, who is referred to as "virginal" several times in the novel, makes Quentin's sudden revelation about Bon suspect and also raises Mr. Compson's version to a higher level of plausibility. It is Mr. Compson who has passed on to Quentin the portrayal of the octoroon courtesans of New Orleans, one of whom is the mother of Charles Bon's son. Mr.

Compson's version of the Henry-Bon affair is based on the assumption that Charles, whom Mr. Compson believes is white, is married to one of these octoroon women and it is Charles' intending bigamy which Henry cannot tolerate. In direct contrast to the motive for Henry's killing of Bon offered by Quentin, Mr. Compson believes that Henry insists on Bon's obligation in marriage to the woman in spite of the fact that she is black. Mr. Compson's portrayal of Henry's insistence on upholding the spoken vow is also a reversal of what Quentin had conceived of in Sutpen's repudiation of his first wife. In Mr. Compson's portrayal of events, he envisions Henry arguing that once a man has pronounced his obligation and regardless of whether that man had understood the terms of his obligation, it is that man's duty to uphold the spoken contract. Charles, however, attempts to convince Henry that there is no obligation to the woman because the marriage ceremony was meaningless, "a formula, a shibboleth meaningless as a child's game, performed by a crone mumbling in a dungeon" (A 117). Yet Henry argues that regardless of how Bon understood the ceremony, the obligation remains. He says,

Suppose I assume an obligation to a man who cannot speak my language, the obligation stated to him in his own and I agree to it: am I any the less obligated because I did not happen to know the tongue in which he accepted me in good faith? No, the more, the more. (A 118)

Bon in Mr. Compson's version assumes the role of Sutpen in Quentin's and plays the "trump card" to the Southern-born Henry by saying,

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? (A 118)

However, in Mr. Compson's story, even a Southerner in Mississippi can accept the miscegenation but cannot disregard the spoken obligation. Henry replies to Bon, "Yes, I know. I know that. But it's still there. It's not right. Not even you doing it makes it right. Not even you" (A 118).

The important distinction here between the father's and the son's version is that Mr. Compson places Henry's highest sense of honor on the value of the spoken word while Quentin believes that Henry regards upholding the social injunctions as most necessary and honorable. The question is, whose version appears most consistent with other glimpses of Henry given in the text? In Mr. Compson's imagined disagreement between Henry and Bon over the validity of the marriage ceremony, Bon attempts to argue that he is not obligated to the woman since the spoken words of the ceremony are meaningless in themselves, and consequently he has performed no other action in uttering those words than articulating gibberish. Henry, however, argues that the meaning of the words spoken does not reside in the individual words but rather in the recognizable intention for speaking, in this case, the intention to pronounce an obligation; thus the speaker performs a meaningful action while speaking, regardless of whether

or not he understands the meaning of the individual words which he utters. For Charles, talking can easily be identified as a meaningless endeavor by disregarding the performative action of the words, but for Henry the verbal intent is the meaning of the utterance since, for him "saying something is doing something," as the philosopher J.L. Austin has argued.¹

In two other brief but important pieces of dialogue attributed to Henry in the text, it becomes obvious that what Henry says and what Henry does are indistinguishable. Mr. Compson's belief that Henry understands verbal intent and action as one and the same appears correct. In one short exchange of words between Henry and Judith, Henry forbids Judith to marry Bon and backs up his intention with the information that Bon is dead since he has just killed him:

[Henry forbids] Now you can't marry him.

[Judith questions] Why can't I marry him.

[Henry informs] Because he is dead.

[Judith repeats] Dead?

[Henry backs up his injunction] Yes, I killed him. (A 172)

Although Quentin has imagined this exchange of words between brother and sister, the pattern of the dialogue is the same as the brief snatch of conversation given in the text as actually occurring between Henry and Quentin on the night Quentin accompanied Rosa to find the "thing" hidden in the old Sutpen house:

¹This interpretation is based on the Speech Acts theory proposed by J.L. Austin and John R. Seale. Both argue that to speak is to perform an act the intention of which is recognizable to the listener and thus the meaning of the spoken words.

[Quentin questions] And you are ___?

[Henry identifies] Henry Sutpen.

[Quentin questions] And you have been ____?

[Henry informs] Four years.

[Quentin questions] And you came home ____?

[Henry informs] To die. Yes.

[Quentin repeats] To die?

[Henry affirms] Yes. To die.

[Quentin repeats] And you have been here ____?

[Henry informs] Four years.

[Quentin repeats] And you are ____?

[Henry affirms identity] Henry Sutpen.

In both dialogues Henry's verbal intentions are supported by actions. His words to Judith, which demand that she not marry, are enforced by his killing of Bon. In his conversation with Quentin, his intention to identify himself in the house is apparent, and his expressed intention to die is actualized in his death by fire during the burning of the old Sutpen home. Both dialogues, the actual and the imagined, show that in spite of the heightened circumstances surrounding the conversations, Henry's words are brief but intentional. What Henry is doing when he utters his words has an obvious intent even if the meaning of the words appears somewhat inscrutable to the hearer, first Judith, then Quentin, who dumbfoundedly repeat Henry's responses. Critics, too, have been somewhat

dumbfounded by the short exchange of dialogue given in the text between Quentin and Henry because it fails to provide information about the killing of Bon. They find the conversation somewhat meaningless except to suggest that it is an excerpt from a larger conversation which must have taken place and in which Henry reveals the facts about Bon to Quentin. However, there is no evidence that any further exchange of words takes place between Quentin and Henry, making such an interpretation pure conjecture. Although the short dialogue fails to reveal the facts about Bon for which the critics are looking, the dialogue does serve to reveal something about Henry, and something more than identifying him as the "thing" hidden in the house. The dialogue identifies Henry as a man who speaks in a manner where his words perform as actions and acts on the intent of his words.

Mr. Compson's insight into the nature of Henry seems to evolve from an understanding of the close association between talk and action attributed to those Sutpen characters from the past, a distinction which also seems to separate the present-day narrators from the characters of the past whom they discuss. Perhaps it is their propensity for action which leads Mr. Compson to declare that those figures from the past, "of a dead time, [were] people too as we are, and victims too as we are, but victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger, more heroic . . . author and victim too [and not] diffused and scattered creatures" (A 89). Unlike their present-day narrators, the figures from the past speak briefly and directly with actions following their

words. Although these characters from the past only are allowed to speak for themselves through a few overheard conversations reported by others, their dialogues reveal that, regardless of the circumstances, they use their words sparingly and intentionally, and after speaking, act on the situation at hand rather than giving into a Hamlet-like discursiveness over the problem. We are told that Judith and Henry "did not need to talk [because] they comprehended without the need of the medium of ear or intellect [and without] understanding one another's actual words" (A 122). Clytie also could command Bon's son to work "with a single quiet word or even gesture a hundred times more fierce than the level murmur of vituperation with which she drove the passerby [away from the boy]" (A 200). Rosa, who is particularly given to a garrulous display of words, is confused by the directness of the Sutpens. She finds contemptuous "four sentences, this four sentences of simple direct words" (A 159) which Judith and Sutpen exchange concerning the absence of Henry and murder of Bon. Rosa also is amazed that in spite of Sutpen's losses from the war he sets about to restore his land rather than talk. When a political deputation of men who gathered at secret meeting places to talk "while the neglected land lay more idle" (A 161) called on Sutpen and "put him to the point of a definite yes or no, with them or against them, friend or enemy" (A 161), he responded that "if every man in the South would do as he himself was doing, would see to the restoration of his own land the general land and South would save itself" (A 161). Quite familiar with the pure ornamental value of words, Rosa cannot understand the

intentional and performative use of Sutpen's words when he proposes to her by saying, "I believe that I shall do no worse at least for you [than he had done for Ellen]" (A 164). Rosa, consequently, disregards his intent and calls his words, "a serene and florid-boast like a sentence" (A 164). Like Absalom's other narrators, Rosa cannot grasp the intent of the words or actions performed by those legendary figures of the past, but can talk about those actions in a profuse and ornamental style which fails to explain exactly just what happened.

There is no doubt that all of the narrators of Absalom are intrigued by the actions of those of the past, actions which appear without motive to the eye of the present. Their search for the "truth" in the present then is inextricably involved with some "truth" about the past, yet the question is, what ultimate truth are they hoping to establish? Ostensibly, each narrator sets out to explain Henry Sutpen's killing of Charles Bon, yet as Richard Adams has noted, the narrators seem to examine those events of the past to explain something about themselves in the present (Motion 173). Mere curiosity or intrigue hardly suffices as an explanation for their overwhelming preoccupation with the Sutpen story. Possibly a clue to their intense interest may be found in Shreve's initial probing of Quentin to "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all?" (A 174) Most critics have centered their attention on Shreve's first demand to tell about the South and interpret the Sutpen tragedy as definitive of the tragic history of the South. However, it is just as likely that the examination of past events is meant to

answer Shreve's ultimate question, "Why live at all?" Although none of the narrators except Shreve precisely articulates those words, the individual accounts of events imply the question. The question is implied in Rosa's Hamlet-like monologue in chapter five where she concludes why awaken from sleep and dreaming if the dream is preferable to reality (A 143). The question also seems to pervade Mr. Compson's narration as he declares that "fate" was the director of Sutpen's play, bringing the curtain down in spite of Sutpen's heroic endeavors and ensuring that the whole show was just "strutting and posturing" (A 73) while signifying nothing. Quentin's insistence, too, that he is just "sick of it all," that he has had "to listen to too much too long," coupled with his final remark that he should never more find peace is most suggestive of the question, "Why live at all?" The fact that Faulkner did assign the dates of September 1909 and January 1910 to the present tense of the novel seems to concur with his remark that he used Quentin as a narrator because it was just before he was to commit suicide in June 1910. As several critics have noted, Quentin's repeated protestations that he has had to listen too long is reminiscent of The Sound and the Fury in which he declared that he wanted to escape from "the loud voices" (Matthews 151, Samway 181, Weinstein 274).

The question of suicide, then, hovers over Absalom. The question, "Why live at all?" may indeed be more central to Absalom than the question, "Why did Henry kill Charles?" However, "the center" of Absalom continues to escape detection, the novel's "truth" remains elusive. From what facts are given in the

novel, we can never be certain why Henry killed Charles, nor is the novel's opening question, "Why did Rosa choose Quentin to tell her story?" ever satisfactorily answered. We can form probable answers from the facts but these answers fail the test of logical truth. Absalom, then, is better defined as a "test" of truth than a "quest" for the ultimate truth, a distinction in terms noted by Harold Fisch in his Study of Literary Mythology (1-5). Fisch suggests that the concept of a "test" is more fitting for the open-ended novel which is concerned with human time and the tensions of historical time than the archetypical "quest" pattern offered by the structuralists who deny the novel's diachronic aspect by imposing a synchronic design on a novel. As Fisch declares, the diachronic aspect of any novel must be taken into consideration because a novel "is surely an unfolding of events in time [because the novel] always involves the time consciousness of the reader/spectator" (17).

A sense of time-consciousness cannot go unnoticed by any reader of Absalom even if he or she merely notices that the novel takes quite a bit of time to get at the details and events behind the final and tragic circumstances which are given in the first pages of the novel. A sense of time consciousness also arises as the reader is confronted with problems concerning the tenses of time as the narrators bring the memory of past events into their present consciousness in a manner which tends to confuse the question, "What is happening now, at the present moment?" The test of any possible "truths" revealed in Absalom then surely includes questions concerning the truth about the nature of time. The

following chapter will examine some of these "truths" about time with the help of the philosophy of Henri Bergson, with whom Faulkner has expressed agreement.

CHAPTER II

THE QUESTION OF TIME

Time, as Patricia Tobin ("Time Myth" 252) has asserted, becomes a dimension of knowledge in Absalom as the narrators search through segments of time to discover the truth about their characters. As John Hagan ("Deja Vu" 32) has noted, the novel appears to move backwards from effect to cause as the narrators search through the more recent past to the remote past in order to discover the truth about what appears to be the meaningless murder of Charles Bon by Henry Sutpen. What they know is that Henry Sutpen killed Charles Bon at the gates of Sutpen's hundred in the year of 1865. Armed with this piece of knowledge, they search through time to discover which events were prior to, or earlier-than the killing, hoping to establish a cause or motivation which would account for the whole string of events. What the narrators perceive is that Thomas Sutpen is the central figure behind the string of events and that he is cut down in his attempt to carry out his life's design by the symbolical implement of time, the scythe. They also recognize that Sutpen, whose actions seem to initiate the fatal string of events, chooses his course for action based on "a need for haste, [and with a sense] of time fleeing beneath him" (A 34). What Sutpen "knows" about time, then, is that each passing moment subtracts from the sum of the allotted years in which he has to complete his design. What the narrators "know" about the time-bound events in the lives of their characters is that a certain event occurred "at" a particular time and "at" a particular place, the

measure or length of that occurrence and which event occurred "earlier-than" or "later-than" another. However, what Sutpen and his narrators "know" appears to lead to failure since Sutpen is frustrated in his attempt to accomplish his design and the narrators are frustrated in their attempts to know the whole truth behind the Sutpen story. As David Wyatt has stated, Faulkner has proven himself to be a "brilliant analyst of failure" (94), in Absalom, yet the question is, what is the key to Faulkner's analysis? There appears to be some relationship between time, knowledge, and failure, but is the failure which pervades Absalom the result of the nature of time itself or is the failure the consequence of the knowledge of time?

Early critics of the novel believed that Faulkner had located the seat of failure in one segment of time, the past (Brooks, Waggoner, Warren). Absalom seemed to demonstrate to them that the tragic, present-day circumstances of the ruined South could be traced to a mistake occurring in the past. Others who thought that the implications of Absalom reached beyond the mere South extended the sense of failure from the Southern past to a location in the past of all mankind. Their interpretations of Absalom argued that Faulkner had demonstrated the natural fact of "hereditary guilt," or original sin, concepts which, as J. Robert Barth points out, "bear a strong Calvinist stamp" (16). Like Barth, those critics believed that Faulkner was proclaiming in Absalom "that since our fathers have sinned, man is no longer free to work out his destiny" (20). They assumed, then, that for Faulkner the past held dominion over the present

and the sense of failure in the present was determined by a failure located in the past. The French Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, however, saw Faulkner as a fellow Existentialist, free of the Calvinist doctrine, and free of the notion that man's failure was the result of past mistakes. Sartre declared that Faulkner's treatment of time indicated that he recognized that "man's misfortune lies in his being time-bound" (87). The "misfortune," as Sartre saw it, was that man's existence in time is finite and consequently man's potential for success is limited. Sartre, therefore, transferred the notion of failure from one segment of time, the past, and placed it within the whole time of an individual's existence.

The latest critics who attempt to account for Faulkner's metaphysics of time seem to hold to Sartre's notion that man's misfortune stems from his "being time-bound," yet deny the time-bound individual the freedom of uniqueness which accompanies the existentialist position. The later critics, like their earlier counter- parts, see Faulkner's sense of the present, as John T. Irwin professes, "castrated" by the memory of the past (Doubling 108). For these critics, the misfortune of man's time-bound existence results from the individual's awareness of his positioning in time; every individual is aware of the fact that his existence has come after another's and consequently those who were positioned first in time hold "priority" in existence. With the perception of time as a movement through successive positions, a weary sense of repetition seems to be a necessary condition of man's time-bound existence. Irwin argues,

The past convicts the present of inadequacy through lack of priority, lack of originality, since to be a copy [of existence] is to be a diminution, because the running on of time is a running down, because to come after is to be fated to repeat the life of another rather than to live one's own. ("Dead Father" 148)

Following Irwin's assessment, David Wyatt declares that Faulkner's metaphysics reveals that man's existence is a "revenge against time" with the challenge for every individual being "to forgive oneself one's place in time" (7). Therefore, for Wyatt, Faulkner's "brilliant analysis of failure" indicates that man's failure is the result of his relative positioning in time. According to Irwin and Wyatt, along with several modern critics, one of the oldest known issues which arises from the apprehension of man's relative positioning in time and which appears to permeate Absalom, is the inevitable dispute between fathers and sons. Irwin argues that the dispute between fathers and sons results from the very "nature" of time which he defines as "a discontinuous, passing" movement. Irwin asserts,

One might say that the struggle between the father and the son inevitably turns into a dispute about the nature of time, not just because the authority of the father is based on priority in time, but because the essence of time is that in the discontinuous, passing moment it is experienced as a problem of the endless displacement of the generator by the generated ("Dead Fathers" 147)

The critics, then, have consistently seemed to locate the source of failure in time itself, either in a particular part of time or in its "essence." Their perceptions of Faulkner's metaphysics of time (or possibly their own) share a common element with the failure of Absalom's characters and narrators. All base their knowledge of time on the relationship of a part to the whole or the relative positioning of events within the whole duration. However, it will be argued in this chapter that such a perception of the nature of time is not Faulkner's but what he demonstrates in Absalom to be a false assumption of mankind which fails to reveal the whole truth concerning time and reality. Absalom tests, rather than affirms, the notion that man can "know" time if he knows the relative number, measure, or position of the parts of time by portraying a world in which such a relative approach to knowledge ends in failure.

Such a faulty approach to the knowledge of time is not just unique to a few literary critics or a few Faulkner characters but can be identified with the problems of assessing time which have perplexed philosophers from antiquity, beginning with Aristotle. Under the weight of analysis, time has appeared unreal. The problems of establishing truths about time have entered as philosophers have been unable to define, or prove the existence of time, by pointing to anything and saying "this is time." Henry Bergson, with whom Faulkner has expressed agreement, has challenged the concepts of these

philosophers by defining specific errors in their approach to time.² These philosophical errors described by Bergson also characterize the approach to time used by Absalom's narrators and characters, as well as its critics. Although a few literary critics from the late sixties into the seventies, such as Adams, Hagan, Schoenberg, Slatoff, and Swiggart referred to Bergson's metaphysics as the philosophy behind Faulkner's treatment of time, no one seemed to establish a direct link between the specific points of the philosophy and what happens in Absalom. Instead of referring to Bergson's specific philosophical points, they rather generally accepted Bergson's insistence on the intuitive method as the correct approach to Absalom. However, it appears that the critics understood Bergson's intuitive approach to absolute knowledge as a type of mysticism which denied logical contradictions in the acceptance of the whole (See Slatoff. Quest 242-248 particularly).

The critics referred to Bergson because they thought that his intuitive method confirmed the "truth" behind Quentin's and Shreve's "creative" version of events which had been arrived at by abandoning the "crusty logic" (A 280) of their Harvard surroundings. It also appeared that Faulkner had poked fun at academic logic in Absalom by commenting that the cold atmosphere of Harvard had always been "dedicated to that best of ratiocination which after all was a good deal like Sutpen's" (A 280) in his dependence on "formula and recipe of

²In two different interviews Faulkner said that he agreed with Bergson's philosophy of time (Meriweather and Millgate, Lion in the Garden 70) and pointed to Bergson as a significant influence (Bouvard 362).

fact and deductions whose balanced sum and product declined" (A 295).

However, neither Faulkner nor Bergson was recommending that logic be abandoned in the search for truth, but rather indicating that intellectual attempts to reconstruct the whole, real "thing" through a summation of representative parts could never be relied upon to yield absolute knowledge of the real and unique "thing" itself. What the critics failed to recognize in Bergson was that he was arguing as a philosopher and not a mystic when he declared that the true essence of time, its continuity, could only be grasped intuitively because any intellectual effort to account for continuity fails to show what is continuous. He very specifically and systematically defined the errors in perceiving the real nature of time as the result of the confusion of time with the intellectual concepts of math and space which resulted in "a confusion of duration with extensity, of succession with simultaneity, and of quality with quantity" (Lindsay 114).

Bergson's major metaphysical point rested on his insistence that the application of mental formulations such as language, math, and space, distorted the true nature of reality. In his Introduction to Metaphysics, he stated, "thus the different concepts that we form of the properties of a thing inscribe round it so many circles, each much too large, and none fitting exactly" (29). As Richard Gale explains in his collection of philosophical essays on time, "[O]ne of the major themes in Bergson's philosophy is that language and concepts--all tools by means of which our intellect operates--viciously distort the true nature of the given, or reality" (391). All intellectual knowledge of reality, declared Bergson, is

a partial or relative knowledge for it seeks to "know" the object by comparison or contrast with another object rather than intuiting the "thing" itself. The reality of time, Bergson argued, has been distorted by the application of such mental concepts as language, math, and space, which deny the real essence of time, its duration or continuous flow. The intellectual and relativist approach seeks to define the continuity of time in terms of a mathematical progression of numbered movements along static points in space just as in our conception of clock time. However, as Bergson demonstrates, when the progression of time is apprehended through a succession of halts as an object (as the hand of a clock) occupies a particular position in space, a sense of the continuous flow of time is lost, and with the loss of a sense of continuity, change itself appears unreal (Creative Mind).

The denial of continuity and change is one of the major flaws of all of Absalom's characters who appear to view the time-bound events of their lives as a discontinuous measure of parts, added to or subtracted from the whole of their existence. When they attempt to add these isolated and frozen segments together to account for the whole of their experience, they are unable to understand the change which has occurred. Absalom's narrators also attempt to discover the final and absolute truth about the whole duration of past events by summing up isolated pieces of the Sutpen story. Rosa begins the narrations in a "grim haggard amazed voice" (A 7), initiating the sense of "amazement" which pervades Absalom as neither characters nor narrators can account for what has

happened over the whole course of time. The failure of Absalom's characters and narrators can be attributed to what Bergson has called the intellect's tendency to "fix" or freeze time in its attempt to understand time through mathematical and spatial properties which define continuity in terms of a divisible and numbered movement through static positions in space. These intellectual concepts, which Bergson argues obscure the real essence of time, are the products of the philosopher's attempts to wrestle with the question, "What is time?" Since the failure of Absalom's characters and narrators can be linked to what Bergson has specifically defined in these philosophical attempts as the faulty assessment of time, a quick summary of the efforts by those major philosophers will help explain Bergson's major points as well as identify the errors of Absalom's characters.

Aristotle (Physics) was the first philosopher to turn his attention seriously to the analysis of time. His initial question concerning time was, "does it belong to the class of things that exist or to that of things that do not exist?" (7). In response to this question he noted that time is constituted of parts such as the past and the future yet realized that these parts surely could not be said "to exist" in the usual sense. He then questioned how a whole of any existent thing could be composed of parts which do not exist. Aristotle reasoned, "One would naturally suppose that what is made up of things which do not exist could have no share in reality" (9). Not satisfied with this conclusion, Aristotle decided to take a look at the usually held notions of time as continuous, constituted of

"motion and a kind of change" (11). For Aristotle, only compounds of form and matter, which he called substances, could be said to exist in themselves and all else was considered as an attribute of these substances. Motion, Aristotle declared, was an attribute of substances, and time was an attribute of motion. Time, therefore, was an attribute of an attribute but had no independent existence of its own. Aristotle emphasized the point, however, that time was not movement but a recognition of a change in movement. He asserted, "the non-realization of the existence of time happens to us when we do not distinguish any change, but the soul seems to stay in one indivisible state, and when we perceive and distinguish [change] we say time has elapsed; evidently time is not independent of movement and change" (11). Aristotle then explained that we apprehend time only when we have marked motion in terms of "before and after" in place. Time, then, was defined by Aristotle as "the number of movement in respect to 'before and after'" (12). After establishing his definition of time, Aristotle deduced the continuity of time from the continuity of motion which he had deduced from the continuity of space. Aristotle declared, "what is moved is moved from something to something, and all magnitude is continuous. Therefore the movement goes with the magnitude. Because the magnitude is continuous, the movement too must be continuous, and if the movement, then the time, for the time that has passed is always thought to be in proportion to the movement" (12).

There are several points here in Aristotle's philosophy with which later philosophers, such as Bergson, have taken issue. The first point raised by Aristotle questions the notion that we can even consider time as a reality. Although many philosophers since Aristotle have suggested that temporal becoming may not be objectively real, Bergson has consistently argued that continual becoming, or the flow of time, is what is real. Aristotle's suspicion that time may not be a reality is a result of what Bergson has called a problem resulting from a confusion on the metaphysical level. For Aristotle, reality was composed of "substances," with all else being attributes of these substances; time and motion were considered "attributes," holding no independent existence. In his study of Bergson, Leszek Kolakowski has explained that the logical priorities of such a metaphysical view of reality are not supportable, but merely have been accepted as a "common-sense" truism. Kolakowski points out that the so-called "common-sense" notion of reality assumes that "movement implies the moving thing," therefore the "thing" is both logically and empirically prior to any act: [or in other words] a resting thing is conceivable, a movement without a moving body is not" (Kolakowski 45). However, Bergson has challenged this metaphysical truism by reversing the logical priorities of traditional metaphysics, declaring that movement, or continuous becoming, is what is real (Metaphysics). "Things," for Bergson as Kolakowski explains, "are the products of a special kind of attention our mind pays to what is repeatable [through analytic attempts to perceive common properties] in the world and susceptible of being included in our

hierarchy of concepts" (Kolakowski 46). In other words the substance or "thing" which our intellect recognizes is not what is real, but the product of mental processes which seek stabilized and repeatable concepts in order to gain, what Bergson calls, "a motionless view of the moving reality" (Metaphysics 42). In spite of our intellectual approach to the world, the stabilized thing, as Bergson argues, cannot be the reality onto which mobility is superposed because "a movement cannot be superposed on an immobility, or it would then coincide with it, which would be a contradiction" (Metaphysics 42).

Aristotle's attempt to explain the continuity and change of time according to his metaphysical view of stationary substances, or what Bergson calls a perception of a "collection of 'things' in space" (Metaphysics 42), leads to contradictions and confusion. According to Bergson, the most notable contradiction stems from the confusion of the whole and continuous progress of time with notions of mathematical progressions and spatial extensity. In his effort to account for continuity and change, Aristotle equated time with a number of movements in respect to "before and after." However, as Bergson argues, the continuous nature of temporal becoming cannot be mathematically continuous because it is incapable of a distinction between earlier and later parts, or in other words, that there is no immediate predecessor or successor for any given event.³ Further, Aristotle's derivation of the continuity of time from the

³Aristotle's account would render time as "discrete" or mathematically divisible with every event having an immediate predecessor or successor. Bergson's continuous time is conceived of as "indiscrete," not capable of division since between any two

continuity of space is especially problematic, and is a point which Bergson particularly refutes. However, well before Bergson, Plotinus noted that Aristotle's "before and after" could not refer to space but time itself.

After Aristotle, Plotinus (The Six Enneads) was the next philosopher who attempted to define time and did so by refuting many of Aristotle's points. Plotinus first noted that time could not be in motion since "movement takes place in time" (24). He argued that we measure movement over successive stages by time and not vice versa. Plotinus added further that since time covers repose as well as movement and since all movement can come to rest, movement could not be equated with time which is held to be continuous. To prove that time, not movement, was the measure of successive stages, Plotinus declared,

In any case, once a thing--whether by point or standard or any other means--measures succession, it must measure according to time: this number appraising movement degree by degree must, therefore, if it is to serve as a measure at all, be something dependent upon time and in contact with it: for, either, degree is spatial, merely--the beginning and end of the Stadium, for example--or in the only alternative, it is a pure matter of Time: the succession of early and late is stage of Time. Time ending upon a certain Now or Time beginning from a Now. (29)

events in continuous time there could be a superdenumerable number of events. For a further distinction between "discrete" and continuous time see, Gale 388-89.

After establishing that "before and after" meant before and after in time, not in movement across space, Plotinus asserted that Aristotle's definition suffered from circularity; Aristotle's definition in fact read, time equals the number of movements in respect to before and after in time. Accusing Aristotle of a tautology, Plotinus attempted his own definition of time which would allow for our notions of change. He declared that time was continuous and creative, somewhat repeating Plato's metaphor of time as the moving "image of Eternity" (31). As Plotinus reasoned, "Time, then, is contained in a differentiation of Life; the ceaseless forward movement of Life brings with it unending time and Life as it achieves its stages constitutes past time" (32). Plotinus then continued by defining Time as "the Life of the soul in movement as it passes from one stage of act or experience to another" (32). However, as Richard Gale points out, this definition is also circular, "for the notion of passing from one stage to another involves time, that is a soul's being in a different qualitative state at different times" (2). Bergson also particularly disputes this notion of "passing from one state to another" as definitive of time. Bergson denies that we can even distinguish between different qualitative states, and consequently argues that we can not conceive of time as the passing from one qualitative state to another. Bergson declares that we can not distinguish between, for example, the qualitative states of "man" and "child" because we do not know when one state leaves off and when the other one begins, and therefore can not speak of one state as passing into another. It is the mind, asserts Bergson, which perceives

these imaginary stops of "child" and "man" abstracted from the flow of continuous becoming. Bergson argues,

We have only the imaginary stops "child" and "man," and we are very near to saying that one of these stops is the other the truth is that if language here were molded on reality, we should not say "the child becomes the man," but "there is becoming from the child to the man." ("Form and Becoming" 404-05)

It becomes apparent for Bergson, then, that our own language seriously interferes with our grasp of the reality of time, its continuous nature, by rendering continuity as the sum of artificial stops, confusing qualitative states with a quantitative number.

The first philosopher to suggest that the problem of defining time might be related to the problems of language was Saint Augustine, but he was unable to solve the puzzle ("Book XI." Confessions). Augustine lamented,

For what is time? Who can readily and briefly explain this? Who can even in thought comprehend it, so as to utter a word about it? But what in discourse do we mention more familiarly and knowingly, than time? And, we understand, when we speak of it, we understand also, when we hear it spoken of by another. What then, is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not; yet I say boldly that I know, that if nothing passed away, time past were not; and if nothing were

coming, a time to come were not; and if nothing were, time present were not. (40)

In spite of his lament, Augustine was determined to discover the true essence of time. Recognizing the same trap as Aristotle that it was futile to attempt to prove the existence of the past or the future, he turned his attention on the present. However, when he tried to define or point to the present, it too vanished. In order to see what could be called "the present," Augustine began to read a psalm consisting of many lines, stopping himself periodically to ask what part of the whole psalm reading could be considered in the present. He realized that the whole reading was not the answer to "what is now?," yet he could not reduce any portion of the psalm into a divisible, present "now." Like Aristotle, Augustine encountered the same problems with measuring time and attempting to relate a part to the whole. Augustine consequently reached the conclusion held by many modern philosophers, as Bergson, that the present "now" is of indivisible duration. Coming to this awareness Augustine further reasoned, if the present cannot be measured, and we surely can not measure a past or future that does not exist, how can we measure time? He noted that we do refer to a "long" and "short" time and decided that what must be meant by a reference to a long or short past or future is that when it was or will be present, it is long or short. Yet such a conclusion led Augustine into a puzzle for he had already established that the present could not be measured because it did not have a divisible duration. Augustine therefore concluded that the inability to measure the

existence of time indicated that time was a "protraction of the mind" (49).

Augustine declared,

But how is that future diminished or consumed, which as yet is not?
or how that past increased, which is now no longer, save that in the
mind which enacteth this, there be three things done? For it
expects, it considers, it remembers; that so that which it expecteth,
through that which it considereth, passeth into that which it
remembereth. (51)

For Augustine, then, time is subjective. The past, present, and future of time depends on the mind where there is a "present of things past, the memory; present of things present, the sight, and a present of things future, the expectation" (51). However, Richard Gale notes that Augustine's concept of time, like Aristotle's and Plotinus', is also circular. Gale notes, "If Augustine's analysis is intended as a definition of time, it too suffers from circularity since we cannot define what we mean by memory (or anticipation) without making explicit reference to a past (or future) event which is remembered (or anticipated)" (5). Augustine, then, had only reasoned himself into a circularity, in essence saying that time is a protraction of the mind's reference to time.

It can be seen, then, that Bergson's major metaphysical point that language interferes with reality is well taken. The attempt to define "time" in the same manner as defining any other noun has led philosophers into tautologies. It was not until Wittgenstein that the legitimacy of the question, "What is time?"

was doubted when Wittgenstein suggested that Augustine had lost his way in language (Gale 5). Later philosophers as Friedrich Waismann, taking Wittgenstein's lead, have noted that although there are many surface grammatical analogies between temporal expressions and expressions that refer to physical objects or processes, temporal expressions do not behave in the same manner as these other expressions. For example, there may be a surface grammatical analogy between "Don't live in the past" and "Don't live in New York," but logically one can not ask where the past is as one can of New York. Further, the use of time as an ordinary noun has led to treating time in the same manner, for example, as an ordinary noun like river and hoping to see the flow of time as one would see the flow of a river. As Frederick Waismann has said, "We are trying to catch the shadows cast by the opacities of speech" (Waismann quoted Gale 7). Waismann further adds that the problem of defining time is related to the "absence of a precise grammar of this word" (63). J.N. Findlay also has declared that much of the confusion about time, particularly its duration, continuity, and measurement resides in the language. Findlay points out that because of the linguistic confusion, "it has been asked how it is 'possible' for that which is the case ever to cease being the case, or how it is 'possible' for the duration of any happening to have a length and a measure" (144). Findlay argues that the problem lies in the assimilation of temporal wholes to object wholes. He notes that whereas object wholes have parts which co-exist, temporal wholes cannot because the past, present and future cannot co-exist. Consequently, Findlay

argues, we can not expect to measure temporal wholes as we do object wholes, expecting to see both the beginning and the end of what is being measured. Therefore the problem of measuring time or noting its continuous nature results from using the noun "time" in the same way we would use the noun "house" where all parts of a house are in existence at once and can be measured.

What becomes apparent from this summary of philosophical issues regarding time is that the problem of time is not a single problem. Rather, says Richard Gale in his preface to The Philosophy of Time, "the problem of time is a group of intimately related questions having to do with the nature of the concepts of truth, events, things, knowledge, causality, identification, action, and change" ("Preface" vii). In spite of the philosophical problems encountered with the concept of time, Henri Bergson has affirmed the reality of time even though the attempts of his predecessors and contemporaries suggest that time, composed of our notions of continuity and change, may not be real since its identity as a whole existent thing cannot be established. Bergson argues that the basis of the problem of time, as well as the problem of knowing all real things, stems from intellectual attempts to analyze reality in terms of repeatable mental concepts which are mere representations rather than the "thing" itself. In his Introduction to Metaphysics, Bergson points out that the approach to knowledge of a whole, unique object or thing through a summation of analytic parts is the work of the intellect, which for the practical purposes of manipulating reality, "reduces the object to elements already known, that is, to elements common to it and other

objects" (24). Through a process of selection, the intellect searches for what is common among things and attempts to express the unique thing or object "as a function of something other than itself" (Metaphysics 44). "All analysis," argues Bergson, "is thus a translation or development into symbols, a representation taken from successive points of view from which we note as many resemblances as possible between the new object which we are studying and others which we believe we already know" (Metaphysics 24). Regardless of the number of successive points of view from which the intellect perceives its object, or the number of analytic parts identified, the sum of these parts can never account for the whole, real thing because these parts are only "partial expressions" about the object and not real component parts of the thing itself (Metaphysics 33). Since the intellect can only "circle" its object, perceiving it from a relative viewpoint, it can never know the absolute thing "which is the object and not its representation; the original and not its translation [because the absolute] is perfect, by being perfectly what it is" (Metaphysics 23). Only "coincidence" with the thing itself will yield absolute metaphysical knowledge, and only through an act of intuition can this metaphysical knowledge be gained. Rather than looking from the outside and applying mental representations onto the object, intuition allows us to "coincide" with the thing itself by "seizing [the thing] from within" (Metaphysics 25). The whole reality of time, then, can only be known intuitively from within rather than through a sum of its analyzable parts.

In The Creative Mind, Bergson states that the real essence of time is its duration or continual flow, but the intellect can only perceive static impressions, or symbolic representations, of the real. The problem is, then, how do we "know" the reality of continuity? Bergson argues that we can intuitively "coincide" with the true nature of time, its continual duration, through the flow of our own consciousness in the same manner that we internally apprehend continuous motion through the movement of one of our limbs. However, intellectual efforts to know the "thing," continuity itself, look from the outside and conceive of what is continuous as a series of artificial halts. For example, the continual motion of a rising arm is intellectually "known" through a recognition of the relative positioning of the arm as it appears to be in a different position later than it was earlier. However, what the intellect "knows" is a series of fixed positions, not continual motion itself. In the same manner, intellectual attempts to establish what is real about time, its continuous flow, have failed. The intellect seeks to freeze the flow of time by defining its whole and continuous progression as a movement through a series of fixed points, confusing time's mobility with notions of spatial extensity. Yet to do so, asserts Bergson, is "to admit a priori the absurdity that movement coincides with immobility" ("Form and Becoming" 402). In The Creative Mind Bergson states that "Our [intellectual] action exerts itself conveniently only on fixed points; fixity is therefore what our intelligence seeks" (14). The intellect seeks to know the continuity of time through an "at-at" relationship where the passing of time is conceived in terms of an object

occupying (or stopped "at") a particular position at a later point than an earlier point. However, when we attempt to account for the continuous transition between the stops, "all is obscure, all is contradictory [because] there is more in the transition than the series of states, that is to say, the possible cuts [divisibility of a continuous segment] -- more in the movement than the series of positions, that is to say the possible stops" ("Form and Becoming" 402).

Bergson blames this intellectual "fixing" of the flux of things on the language which tends to obscure the truth concerning the continual becoming of time and reality. He argues that our language, which in itself is composed of symbols, reflects our mental representation of the world as a collection of stabilized things in space. Recognizing that the philosophers' reliance on language to reveal truths has distorted nature, Bergson declares:

The Greeks trusted to nature, trusted the natural propensity of the mind, trusted language above all, in so far as it naturally externalizes thought. Rather than lay blame on the attitude of thought and language toward the course of things, they preferred to pronounce the course of things to be wrong. ("Form and Becoming" 405)

Bergson argues that the linguistic interference with the grasp of the continuous nature of time is reflected in the modern day "B-theory," revitalized by A. Grunbaum and also followed by A. J. Ayer and R. D. Bradley, which proposes that true statements concerning the past, present, or future can be constructed in

terms of an "at-at" or "earlier-than, later-than" relationship.⁴ Since statements such as "x is present" or "x is past (future)" cannot be timelessly true, B-theorists suggest that timelessly true statements can be constructed in the form of "x occurred at (date)," or "x occurred earlier-than (later-than) y." Bergson contends, however, that such an "at-at" or "earlier-than, later-than" concept of time only reveals a truth about the relationship of parts but fails to reveal any truth concerning the whole and continuous nature of time (Form and Becoming).

The failure of Absalom's narrators to retrieve the whole truth concerning the string of events in the Sutpen saga is the result of this same error which Bergson defines as the attempt to know the truth about the whole of time by knowing the relationship of its parts. The "facts" of the story which the narrators retrieve and attempt to sum up into a whole truth are given in terms of an "at-at"

⁴ This is the standard argument proposed by B-theorists who claim that A-relations, or the past, present, or future status of an event holds logical contradictions since any event will have all three A-relations. Their claim is that all A-relations can be converted into B-relations of "earlier-than-later than" which are timelessly true relations. Most B-theorists also argue that A-relations are purely psychological, requiring a perceiver, whereas "earlier-than-later than" relations are true of objective reality, which does not require a perceiver to exist. A-theorists, however, argue that only A-relations can account for change (future to present to past) whereas B-relations cannot. A-relations, then, are the only temporal relations while B-relations are punctal. A-theorists also argue that all B-relations require a perception of A-relations, and thus all B-relations can be converted into A-relations which are more accurate since "X is earlier than Y" does not explain whether X is past, present, or future. Although Bergson's concept of experienced, or conscious time, would appear to be closer to the A-theorists, Bergson denies that the whole of time can be split into parts as the past, present or future. It is the splitting up into states, which in reality are indistinguishable, that is contradictory to continuity and change, according to Bergson. For further distinction between A and B theory see, Gale 65-85, 170-76, 293-303.

or "earlier-than, later-than" relationship in time. A linear chronology requested by Faulkner's editors to clear up the time scheme in the novel appears at the end of Absalom. Although the inclusion of this chronology was not Faulkner's wish and contains several errors, as Langford (10-12), Ragan (1-18), Schoenberg (75-8), and Watkins (79-87) have noted, the supposed "facts" of the story appear here in the form of what event occurred earlier than another or what happened "at" what place "at" what date. For example:

1859 Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon meet at University of Mississippi. Judith and Charles meet that Xmas. Charles Etienne St. Valery Bon born, New Orleans. [followed by next entry:]

1865 Henry kills Bon at gates. Rosa Coldfield moves out to Sutpen's Hundred.

All of the chronological entries fit this "at-at", "earlier-than, later-than" formula as events which appear randomly scattered throughout the novel are arranged in such a linear progression from 1807 to 1910. Although truth statements about the relationship of parts within the whole duration can be established in terms of which event occurred "earlier-than" another, no amount of logic will reveal the truth concerning the whole order of events, nor establish that an earlier event determined the occurrence of a later event. In spite of the information rendered by the "at-at" arrangement, the individual events listed in this chronology remain isolated from each other and there is no sense of

continuity or transition from one date to another. The fact that Henry killed Charles at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred in the year of 1865 appears to have nothing to do with what occurred earlier in New Orleans in 1859. Nor does the fact that Sutpen repudiated his first wife and son in Haiti in the year of 1831 seem to have any connection with his forbidding of the marriage of Judith to Bon and Henry's subsequent repudiation of birthright on Christmas, 1860. As Bergson argues, "there is more in the transition than the series of states, that is to say, the possible cuts [divisibility of time in terms of an event's immediate predecessor or successor as in "before-after"] -- more in the movement than the series of positions, that is to say, the possible stops" ["at-at"]." What is more for Bergson than the fixed states or series of positions is the reality of continuous transition itself. As Bergson argues, this "at-at" fixing of time only yields frozen frames of reference which cannot account for transition and change.

Bergson calls this intellectual fixity represented in terms of "at-at" or "before and after," the "cinematographical mechanism of thought," a term he derives from the technique of cinematography where movement is represented through the juxtaposition of frozen frames where an object is in a different position in a later frame than an earlier one ("Form and Becoming" 397-406). However, Bergson argues, when we place these different frames side by side we are still viewing frames of frozen motion and not motion itself. In the Creative Mind he declares,

How can we help seeing that the essence of duration is to flow and that the fixed place side by side with the fixed will never constitute anything which has duration. It is not the "states" or simple snapshots we have taken that are real; on the contrary, it is the flux, the continuity of transition is the change itself that is real. (10)

The failure of Absalom's characters can be attributed to this cinematographical mechanism of thought which renders change meaningless. In an attempt to understand their present circumstances, Absalom's characters place events of their past next to the events of their present and examine these frozen frames of reference to account for the change which has occurred. By juxtaposing these frozen time segments, they confuse "time past" with "time passing," an equivocation of terms which Bergson distinguishes (M. F. Cleugh 124). Recognizing the passing of time only in terms of a static placement of events, they lose any sense of the transition of one event into another, and consequently, they cannot account for the change. The examination of these frozen time frames yields no knowledge of the flux of time and leads to halts in consciousness symbolized by the "closed door" imagery which pervades Absalom.⁵ Both narrators and characters are continually shown as being shut out or shut in by a closed door. The first and most significant door is closed on young Sutpen at the plantation, and Sutpen, in turn, closes the door on Charles Bon. Ellen,

⁵The repetitive occurrence of the "closed door" strikes almost any reader. Countless critics have attempted to interpret this symbol. For a sampling, see, Hagan 46, Ross 139 and Weinstein 183.

Sutpen's wife, and Charles Bon's octoroon wife shut themselves up in a closed bedroom because they cannot deal with their change in affairs. Clytie, Sutpen's half-black daughter by a slave, bars Rosa from the door to Charles Bon's body and to the door of the live Henry. Clytie also refuses to allow Wash Jones' entry into the Sutpen home while Sutpen is away at war. Rosa accounts for her childhood in terms of a "lurking and listening" behind closed doors. Her father, Goodhue Coldfied, closes himself up in the attic until his death because his conscience will not let him look on the "waste of materials," not men, during the Civil War. Henry shoots Bon at the gate of Sutpen's Hundred, barring Bon's entrance into the family, and returns home years later to die, like his grandfather Coldfied, behind the doors of his home. Quentin often falters in his narration of events as he pictures Henry informing Judith of Bon's death and this scene is described as "that door which he [Quentin] too could not pass" (A 172). The refusal of entry to Wash Jones and his granddaughter leads to Sutpen's death as Wash hears Sutpen deny the girl and her child "a good stall in the stable" because Wash's granddaughter, Milly, has been unable to provide Sutpen with a male child. These symbolical doors or halts in consciousness reveal a stasis in the individual's frame of reference which cannot account for continuity (a passing through of the door) or change. The fact that these frozen frames, or closed doors, yield no knowledge is echoed by Rosa who tells Quentin that for almost fifty years she has asked, "Why? Why? Why? and Why?" (A 167) Sutpen, too, is left in "amazement" at the change which has occurred over the course of time.

When he is threatened by the collapse of his design, he brings the events of his past and the circumstances of his present to Grandfather Compson's scrutiny in hopes that the "legal mind" of General Compson might detect the error which he himself cannot locate. However, Sutpen's juxtaposition of past events to present fails to reveal how his present-day circumstances could have deviated from the design of his past efforts, and he is left sitting in Grandfather's office in amazement,

trying to explain with the patient amazed recapitulation [of events which] he had long since given up any hope of understanding . . . , trying to explain to circumstance, to fate itself, the logical steps by which he had arrived at a result absolutely and forever incredible.

(A 263)

Sutpen's attempt to "recapitulate" events to account for the change which has occurred is what Bergson describes as the faulty attempt to account for the whole, continuous nature of time through a summation of parts which in turn confuses the whole successive nature of time with a simultaneous apprehension of parts. One of Bergson's major points is that the whole reality of time can never be viewed as a sum of parts in the manner which we account for time's passing in our concept of the clock. Our concept of clock time, argues Bergson, is based on the intellectual confusion of time with concepts of math and space

since the clock shows movement from one numbered point to another.⁶ Bergson explains that in space, the parts of the sum are external to each other and are simultaneously apprehended since the position is distinguished from the object that occupies the position, or the point on the clock is distinguished from the hand which occupies the point. The relationship between the simultaneities, notes Bergson, is the same as the relationship of the parts to the whole.

However, Bergson argues that when the time process is comprehended as the sum of the simultaneities or the sum of the number of movements, the unity is lost and change becomes meaningless. Bergson describes this loss of unity with the analogy of a man listening to a song, saying that if a man listens to or counts each separate note of the song, he will have heard every note of the song but he will not have heard the melody (Creative Mind 21). Like the man in Bergson's analogy, Thomas Sutpen misses the continual rhythm of his life experiences by concentrating on the single beat of time as it ticks away. As Quentin thinks, Sutpen "must have seen his situation as that of the showgirl, the pony, who realizes that the principle tune she prances comes not from horn and fiddle and drum but from a clock and calendar" (A 181). Perceiving the whole and continuous nature of time as a sum of its parts, Sutpen becomes conscious of an event only in terms of its length or measure, or of how much time it has cost him. When he speaks of his repudiation of his first wife, he sees the experience

⁶For further explanation of Bergson's distinction between clock time and experienced time see A. D. Lindsay.

only as a source of lost time, a sum to be added to or subtracted from the whole duration of his allotted years. Sutpen claims,

I could have reminded them [wife's family] of these wasted years, these years which would now leave me behind with my schedule not only the amount of elapsed time which their number represented, but that compensatory amount of time represented by their number which I should now have to spend to advance myself once more to the point I had reached and lost. (A 264)

It becomes apparent, then, that Sutpen is guilty of the same errors that Faulkner points out in "A Rose for Emily" of "confusing time with its mathematical progression" (129), and in Absalom of equating time with space, unable to recognize that "time is longer than any distance" (A 249). Since Sutpen perceives the past as a sum of years subtracted from his present and forever isolated in some remote point, he cannot understand how the past could possibly survive or have any real existence in the present. Consequently he cannot understand how the repudiation of that first wife and son in the past could carry any real threat over into his present or future, and in spite of his calculated efforts to "balance and weigh" the sum, he can only arrive at "a result absolutely and forever incredible."

Sutpen's failure to connect his past with his present is the result of what Bergson has described as the relativist approach which seeks to know the whole reality by a comparison or contrast of one part or object to another. Yet, as

Bergson declares, this attempt to sum up analytic parts will never yield knowledge of the whole thing in its absolute, nor will the addition of static frames of time, such as the past, present, or future, yield a sense of the whole, continuous reality of time. When the reality of time, its continuous transition, is lost, so too is a real sense of change. The question then becomes, how can we account for change if our intellect is incapable of apprehending continuous transition?

In Creative Evolution (1-22), Bergson argues that we can grasp the continuous change of time through the flow of our own consciousness, noting that when we reflect on our conscious life we apprehend a process of change, where, unlike spatial or relative time, none of the parts are external to each other. Rather, the parts are interpenetrating in that the past is carried on into the present, which also carries the weight of the future. In his Introduction to Metaphysics, Bergson explains that when we consciously reflect on ourselves, we will note that while our personality is whole at any given instant, it is constantly being built up by "a succession of states, each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it In reality no one [state of perception] begins or ends, but all extend into each other" (25). In other words, knowledge of ourselves will inform us of a whole and continuous personality which exists through the integration of successive perceptions. In any perceptual instant there is also a perception of succession through memory and anticipation. The whole, successive nature of time, which entails change, then, can be grasped

internally through knowledge of our conscious self. As Bergson argues, "there is one reality, at least, which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by simple analysis. It is our own personality in its flowing through time--our self which endures" (Metaphysics 24).

By becoming conscious of our own self, then, we can directly experience the real and absolute essence of time and change which no act of analysis can duplicate. Unlike intellectual relativism, or spatial conceptions, Bergson's "time consciousness," or experienced time, is a perception of the whole since no single segment, such as past, present, or future, can be isolated and given meaning independent of other times. Time experienced, explains Bergson, entails a multiplicity of psychical states which cannot be split up into separate elements without losing meaning. Since time experienced is not grasped through a succession of positions, but through the intuitive merging of one moment into another, experienced time entails a notion of evolutionary change whereas spatial conceptions deny mobility and change. In The Creative Mind, Bergson explains the difference between the "juxtaposition" of spatial time and the "interpenetration" of conscious time as a distinction between evolution where the interpenetration produces something "radically new" and "unfurling" where there is merely "a re-arrangement of the pre-existing" (21).

Bergson's concept of experienced time, then, entails the notion of an evolutionary change unlike intellectual constructs of spatial continuity which

conceive of passing time as the displacement of one position by the next. In Creative Evolution Bergson argues,

For our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were there would never be anything but the present [which philosophers have been unable to point to or prove the existence of]-- no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration. Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. (4)

Since duration is not just one instant replacing another, but the interpenetration of moments, each time the past merges with the present a new state is created. Therefore, as Bergson explains in Creative Evolution, for a conscious being, to exist is to change or mature, "to go on creating oneself endlessly; an ego which does not change does not endure and a psychic state which is not replaced by a following state also does not endure" (22).

The repetitiousness of existence which Faulkner's critics have noted, then, has no place in Bergson's philosophy which conceives of the continuity of time as a creative process. In Creative Evolution Bergson declares,

From the survival of the past it follows that consciousness cannot go through the same state twice our personality, which is being built up each instant with its accumulated experience, changes without ceasing. By changing, it prevents any state, although superficially identical with another, from ever repeating it in its very

depth. That is why our duration is irreversible. We could not live over again a single moment, for we should have to begin by effacing the memory of all that had followed. Even could we erase this memory from our intellect, we could not from our will. (5-6)

Although a sense of repetition overrides Absalom, with the plot, for example, being given three times in the first five pages, as Dirk Kuyk has noted (45), the repetitions can be shown to be the result of what Bergson has described as the faulty assessment of time. Repetition is the result of intellectual knowledge, or analysis, which "freezes the flux into a "thing" which necessarily partakes of the immobility of "a *point* of view" (Metaphysics 48).

The repetition which arises as the narrators attempt to get the story told is the result of their inability to fit the old bits and pieces of past tales together into an absolute whole. They attempt to take the well known parts of the story and add these parts together to form a significant whole which will reveal the absolute truth behind what appears to be a meaningless string of events. The "facts" available to them is often in terms of numbers which they hope to sum up into the whole truth. For example, it is known that it took Thomas Sutpen two years "to drag house and garden out of the virgin swamp" (A 40) and another three years to complete his house with doors, windows and a wife. However, no one knows why Sutpen came to Jefferson, Mississippi in the year of 1833 or why he endured the long two years construction of his home. No one can conceive of why Sutpen, after constructing his home, lived in supreme bachelorhood for three

years until he chose to marry Ellen Coldfield in June of 1838, almost five years to the day from the Sunday morning that he first rode into town.

It is also known that Henry Sutpen left home with Charles Bon during their Christmas visit in 1861 to Sutpen's Hundred and after a four years duration, killed Bon. It is also believed that Judith Sutpen waited during these four years for her marriage proposal from Bon to materialize. However, the knowledge of these lengths of duration only seems to result in more problems than answers. The fact that Judith saw Charles Bon "three times in two years, for a total period of seventeen days counting the time that [her mother] Ellen consumed" (A 99) appears inconsistent with the information that she was "bent on marrying him to the extent of forcing her brother to the last resort of homicide to prevent it, and that after a period of four years during which she could not have been always certain that he was still alive" (A 99). Armed with these "facts," Mr. Compson makes three attempts to prove that love was the motivating force behind the mysterious chain of events, but like the rest of the narrators, can not establish any essential nature of the events. Mr. Compson declares that the addition of sums "just doesn't explain" the whole string of events, and the attempt to do so becomes like "a chemical formula which you pour over, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again [but] nothing happens" (A 101).

The attempt to bring together the relative positioning of events within the time span also fails to identify the truth concerning the whole duration. The

narrators believe that if they can determine the position of known events within the span of years covering the Sutpen material, or establish which event occurred at what place, they can discover the essential nature of those events. For example, no one knows why Henry Sutpen repudiated his birthright and left home with Charles Bon only to kill him four years later. All believe that Sutpen must have told Henry something about Bon which Henry, at first, could not have accepted. This interpretation of the "truth" is based on a knowledge of who appeared where and when. All believe that Sutpen went to New Orleans in the summer after Bon's first Christmas visit just to confirm his suspicions about Bon and when Henry returned with Bon the following Christmas, Sutpen gave Henry the damaging word on Bon. However, no one ever knows exactly why Sutpen went to New Orleans and many never knew that he went there at all. Nevertheless, this movement from place to place in time serves the narrators as the explanation for the change which occurs in the Sutpen household as the oldest son, Henry, repudiates home and leaves with the intended bridegroom of his sister. The narrators rely on this factual movement across space to explain Henry's leaving with Bon, because no one knows what Henry and Sutpen argued about and only a few household servants heard Henry repudiate his birthright. What becomes apparent, however, is that the only truth which the relative positioning of events within the whole time span can produce is a truth concerning the relationship of parts within the story but no truth behind the whole story. Consequently, the narrators are doomed to repeat their facts, going

further and further back through time in an attempt to establish what occurred "earlier," but every time they retrieve a new piece of information they must add it to the sum of their knowledge, "bringing it together again and again," and making Absalom's narration appear repetitious.

A weary sense of repetition also seems to plague the consciousness of Absalom's characters who, in their attempt to escape repetition, ironically doom themselves to repeated acts. Thomas Sutpen senses a repetitive nature of existence early in life during the three months in which he attended the plantation school. Sutpen tells grandfather Compson,

I learned little [in school] save that most of the deeds, good and bad both, incurring opprobrium, or plaudits or reward either, had already been performed and were to be learned about only from books. (A 241-2)

After being turned away from the plantation society, Sutpen formulates his "design" so that he can "fight" the planter, or at least make his own existence different. However, as Richard Moreland suggests, he merely repeats society's idealized image of a planter (55), the man who can shut the door on the less fortunate. In spite of the fact that Sutpen wants to raise his offspring "forever free from brutehood" (A 261), he turns Milly and her child away from the door, repeating the rejection of his first wife and child. Unable to detect his error, he pursues his inflexible design through acts of repetition which he calls "choices." Rather than allowing him new alternatives, his "choices" lead to repetition and

death. The sense of fatalism which characterizes Charles Bon also seems to stem from his perception that life is so repetitious that all desires have been satiated long ago. Mr. Compson envisions Bon attempting to reconcile Henry to his New Orleans mistress by explaining that such sins are so repetitious that even God, "who must have been young once," is bored. Bon tells Henry that God has "looked at as much crude and promiscuous sinning without grace or restraint or decorum" followed by "Heaven-placating cries of satiated abasement and flagellation" that neither "the defiance or the placation can Heaven find interest or even, after the first two or three times, diversion" (A 116).

Both Sutpen and Bon seem to pursue their deaths, Sutpen into the hands of Wash Jones and Bon into Henry, because neither can conceive of change or the possibility of anything new emerging from the course of time. They cannot conceive of anything new or original occurring because their perception of the progression of time is of an endless displacement of moments where the past is distanced and isolated from the present "is" and future becoming. Since they only recognize a past severed from present existence, the past has no real meaning for them and they are doomed to repeat a past never acknowledged as actual. Unlike his characters' perception of time, however, Faulkner has echoed Bergson's notion of the survival of the past by saying that "there is no such thing as was because the past is" (Faulkner in the Univ. 50). This is a rather curious sentence in which the syntactical and semantical structures are surely determined by "poetic license." The verb "was" is used here as a noun and the verb "is"

appears as a syntactic displacement. In spite of the structural disturbance, we can understand the sentence to mean that the past is never left behind but carried into the present. However, if the syntax is restructured grammatically, the sentence would read, "there was no such thing really because it is (past)." The sentence then reads as a denial of an actual past, or a denial that what is occurring in the present could be related to a past event as in the mechanisms of repetition neurosis.⁷ The words from Absalom which most nearly echo this structural re-arrangement of Faulkner's sentence are found in the letter to Judith from Charles Bon. Bon, during a respite in the fighting writes, "Because what Was is one thing, and now it is not because it is dead, it died in 1861, and therefore what IS--" (A 131). Bon, ironically declaring that the past is non-existent, seeks to repeat his past by pursuing his marriage to Judith in spite of all that has occurred. His inability to recognize change is apparent in his fatalistic attitude towards the Civil War which he sees as an event signalling a lost past rather than recognizing that the present war is a change in process from past mistakes.

Absalom's characters, then, appear doomed to failure because of an error in their perception of time which cannot account for the whole continuous nature of time and change. Unable to integrate their past with their present, they

⁷For a further reading on disturbances manifested in syntactic and semantic structures see Donald P. Spence. Also for further understanding of repetition neurosis see Freud's (The Complete Works, Vol. 18) explanation for patients who cannot remember the past and repeat the repressed material as a "contemporary experience" (11).

cannot assume a new state of existence and are left in a fragmented existence of arrested growth. The butterfly imagery which surrounds Ellen Coldfield, as Joseph Reed notes, metaphorically suggests this inability to grow, change, and sustain a new state of existence (154). Ellen, referred to as the "butterfly" wife of Thomas Sutpen, emerges from the cocoon of the Coldfield household to become the social butterfly of Sutpen's Hundred, flaunting her children and the news of the fashionable engagement before the town. Ellen is called that "Niobe without tears" who, like the mythical Niobe, flaunted her children and saw them destroyed before her eyes. Unlike Niobe, however, Ellen can not weep for her lost children because she can not understand why Henry left home with the intended bridegroom, destroying her "fairy-tale" story. Rather than learning from her losses, Ellen refuses to suffer in the public eye and retreats to her bedroom, waiting to die. The arrested growth and stasis of other Absalom characters is also metaphorically rendered in the novel. Richard Coanda points to the novel's dominating "child-in-the-womb" imagery which suggests that the adult has never outgrown the child (8). Sutpen, for example, is paradoxically seen as both child and man, referring to himself as "the boy symbol," and the old, outraged Rosa appears as a "crucified child," telling her story as she sits in a chair too tall for her with her feet "clear of the floor with that air of impotent and static rage like children's feet" (A 7). As Sally Page has noted (105), Rosa is often pictured in terms of arrested movement as she is seen standing frozen, "motionless in the attitude and action of running" (A 146). Quentin too, appears in the paradoxical

imagery of stasis and movement as he tries to sit absolutely still to control his violent, jerking reaction to his memory of Henry. All of their attempts to remain fixed in one stage are a denial of the fluidity of time and a denial of Faulkner's assertion that "Life is motion" (Lion in the Garden 253).

In 1955 Faulkner voiced his agreement with Bergson's concept of time as continual duration, or integrated motion, by declaring that "there is only the present moment in which I include the past and the future and that is eternity" (Lion in the Garden 70). In spite of Faulkner's professed agreement with Bergson, he has made his major narrator, Quentin, suffer from a faulty perception of time possibly to cast doubt on Quentin's ability to retrieve the absolute truth about the past. Of all Absalom's characters and narrators, Quentin seems to suffer the most from an over determined sense of repetition arising from his failure to recognize the continuity of time as a creative becoming. Quentin's torture and despair is rooted in his perception of the progression of time as a movement through displaced positions where the occupants of earlier positions hold a timeless or necessary priority and, consequently, originality. As several critics have noted, Quentin's efforts to supply the "original" motives of incest and miscegenation to the prior Sutpen material may be his attempt to usurp the priority of the past (Bleikasten, Irwin, Shoenberg, Wyatt). However, Quentin's sense of priority and originality becomes so threatened that he can no longer even feel that he is author of his own words. His narration, as Warwick Waddleton asserts (184), is full of "Father said,"

indicating that the words which Quentin speaks are not his own. When Shreve attempts to re-tell the story of what Mr. Compson had told his son, Quentin begins to fear that he will lose even his position of authority, or priority, which he had held by hearing the story before Shreve. As Shreve begins talking, Quentin thinks,

Am I going to have to hear it all again. I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do--. (A 279)

It is Quentin's sense that he will never gain "authority" over his life because all has been said and done, all words and experiences are mere repetitions, that leads to his final despairing remark "never more of peace." Estella Schoenberg declares "It is the repetitiousness of existence, both in the individual life and from generation to generation that defeats Quentin" (141). Using the metaphor of a wave spreading from an original sinking pebble, Quentin relays his weariness of repetition in a passage which Nancy Blake suggests indicates Quentin's final psychological break from reality (141). As he listens to Shreve talk in a voice which reminds Quentin of his father, he thinks,

Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading [to

another pool of water] . . . it doesn't matter; that pebble's watery echo whose fall it [second pool] did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm thinking. Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us. (A 261-62)

Curiously, Henri Bergson has also used a wave metaphor to describe what he calls "the triumph of the life impulse itself," or the continuity of existence which results from the survival of the past (Carr 64). Bergson declares,

From our point of view, life appears in its entirety as an immense wave which, starting from a centre, spreads outwards, and which on almost the whole of its circumference is stopped and converted into oscillation. (Carr 64)

In Creative Evolution, Bergson also states that all history affects one's present condition because the progression of time is the steady progress of the past which "gnaws continually into the future and swells as it advances" (4). Faulkner has also expressed Bergson's concept of the continuity of time as a "swelling process" by declaring that "time is not a fixed condition but the sum of the combined intelligences of all men who breathe" (Faulkner in the Univ. 113). However, there is an essential difference between Bergson's wave metaphor and the wave metaphor used by Faulkner's character Quentin. Bergson celebrates the

continuity of mankind which he sees as consistent with his philosophy of time as duration since no moment is ever lost but carried forward through continual interpenetration with all other times. As Bergson has argued, time's duration can be conceived of as a "creative evolution" because the continual interpenetration of moments produces that which is "radically new," creating a change which denies a repetition of the "pre-existent." Further, since the whole reality of time is its duration or continuity, time can not be split up into separate units each with an independent existence; consequently, no one time can determine the existence of another, making creativity and freedom a reality. It is this notion of creative freedom which Bergson celebrates and finds consistent with his philosophy of time.

Quentin, however, feels doomed by a displaced past only surviving as a memory or echo which returns to haunt him like a wave spreading over his present consciousness against his will. The past, then, appears to have an independent existence which threatens Quentin with its priority and authority, forcing him to listen to endless echoes and assaulting him with ghostly impressions. As Quentin sits in the frosty air of his Harvard room, he is plagued by memories of a past which he had hoped to sever and leave behind in Mississippi. In spite of the chill of a Massachusetts' winter, he is overcome by the returning impressions of the weary, dusty, heat from the late summer in Mississippi where he was forced to endure his father's and Rosa's talking. Consumed by the impression, he reacts to Shreve's talking in the present with the

same feelings of repugnancy and oppression that he felt while being told and having to listen to the talk in the past. As Shreve lights a cigar and begins to talk, the present scene gives way to Quentin's memory of his father's cigar and fireflies glowing in the twilight while the very air seemed to weigh heavily and oppressively with the pungent odor of cigar smoke mingled with the oversweet scent of wisteria. Quentin reacts to Shreve "brooding, almost sullen," as he confuses his past with his present rather than integrating them. It becomes apparent that Quentin cannot integrate time because he cannot conceive of himself as an integrated whole. He begins to confuse his own identity with that of his father's, Shreve's, and even Thomas Sutpen's, reinforcing his earlier comment that he was not a being or entity, but a "commonwealth of ghosts." These "ghosts" or impressions from the past doom Quentin to endless repetitions, depriving him of the freedom to "go on creating himself endlessly." In Time and Free Will, Bergson distinguishes freedom from determinism in a manner which elucidates Quentin's condition in Absalom. Although Bergson acknowledges the fact that most people live without knowing true freedom, he maintains that free acts can occur when the whole self enters into the action without relying on memory or impressions. When an act follows an impression without the whole self, or what Bergson defines as the self's most "intimate feelings of happiness and honor," interfering with that act, then the individual acts automatically rather than as a free agent. An act is considered free then, if it relies on judgment rather than memory.

By the end of Absalom, it becomes apparent that Quentin has become so totally dominated by memories and impressions that his judgment is severely impaired. His response to Henry appears neurotically out of proportion to his object since Quentin seems to react to the live Henry as one would to a ghost. In the novel's final pages, Quentin is seen as an individual violently and uncontrollably reacting to the impression made by his meeting with Henry, whose words "to die" are automatically repeated by Quentin. Apparently Quentin has incorporated another ghost, Henry, into his own identity, throwing Henry's words back to him as if he, Quentin, were Henry's mirror image. Like Henry, Quentin would prefer to keep still, or return home to die, rather than endure the jerking torment of a world in incomprehensible motion and change. As Richard Adams has stated,

[Faulkner's] most completely defeated characters go down because they are fundamentally opposed to life. They try to find something unchanging to stand on motionless in the midst of change. But motion sweeps them on so relentlessly that their only escape is one or another kind of suicide. . . . They are desperate because a living world keeps forcing them into action in spite of their desire for security, peace and stasis. (13)

The failure to accept, account for, or even recognize change is characteristic of both narrators and characters in Absalom. This inability to accept or account for change is the result of what Bergson has defined as the

faulty intellectual attempt to "know" time's continuous progress or duration which brings about change. As Bergson has argued, rather than establishing that time, composed of our notions of continuity and change, is real, intellectual efforts to "know" time have only contradicted the notions of continuity and change. The contradictions arise as the intellect attempts to "know" the "real thing," time itself, in terms of something other than itself, and that is in terms of mental constructs such as language, math, and space. Using concepts of math and space to represent time, the essence of time, its continuous flow, is understood as a numbered movement across space. This spatial concept of time is the same as our concept of clock time where the passing of time is represented in terms of a numbered movement of the hands of a clock as they are seen in a different position at different points on the face of the clock. Our language also renders this spatial conception of time by noting the passing of time according to "at" which place on the clock the hand has stopped "at" in a "later" frame of reference than an "earlier" one. Such a confusion of time's mobility with spatial extensity, however, only demonstrates that time is not continuous but composed of a series of halts or stops. Yet, as Bergson insists, it is the continuous transition of time which is real and accounts for change, not a summation of artificial stops or cuts along a continuous segment. When the whole time process which brings about continuous change is conceived as a sum of numbered or measured segments, a qualitative change becomes confused with a quantitative number.

Intellectual attempts to sum up the parts to account for the whole have also failed to identify the "thing," time, as a real whole entity. Applying mathematical concepts to reveal the whole sum through an addition of its parts only confuses the whole successive nature of time with the simultaneous apprehension of its parts. For example, in clock time we acknowledge the time process through a simultaneous apprehension of the hand of the clock and the point it occupies, grasping, Bergson argues, the relationship of parts to the whole, but not the whole itself. In the same manner, the attempt to identify the whole existence of time as a sum of its parts, the past, present, and future, has led philosophers into questioning the reality of time. It has been asked how a whole of anything which exists could be composed of parts, such as the past or future, which in themselves can not be said to exist. However, Bergson explains that such intellectual efforts miss what is real about time, its whole continuous nature. Consequently, if continuity is what is real about time, no single segment, such as the past, present, or future, can be isolated from the rest and given independent existence. Time, as Bergson asserts in Creative Evolution, is the "steady progress of the past as it continually gnaws into the future, swelling as it advances" (4). It is this continual progress of time, the continuity of transition which is real and brings about change. Any attempt to freeze the flow, or disrupt the continual transition of time fails to account for the nature of time and change.

The failure of Absalom's characters to integrate the time-bound events of their lives and the failure of the narrators to account for the transition between

events which lead up to the killing of Charles Bon are elucidated by Bergson's metaphysics of time. Both the characters and narrators of Absalom seek to understand the changes which have occurred over the course of time by intellectually freezing the flow of time. They measure the lengths of time segments and compare or contrast one length to another, position events according to which event came "earlier" or "later," or juxtapose frozen segments of the past and present, and examine these frozen frames of reference to account for the continuity and change between events.

The failure of Faulkner's narrators and characters, then, can be attributed to their intellectual "fixing" of time and not to the nature or "essence" of time itself. Unable to recognize or cope with the continual becoming of reality, they cling to fixed abstractions which deny change and deny the whole "thing itself." It is their "knowledge" which is faulty, their application of words, symbols, and other mental constructs onto the real which makes them, as Bergson has said about the early philosophers, "prefer to pronounce the course of things to be wrong rather than lay blame on the attitude of thought and language." The following chapter will examine more closely this intellectual failure to know the real object or thing.

CHAPTER III

THE FAILURE OF KNOWLEDGE

This chapter will examine the intellectual failure of Absalom's characters. Faulty knowledge and faulty thinking patterns will be identified according to Bergson's major metaphysical contentions and further defined by later theorists in psychology and linguistics who appear to agree with Bergson's major points that neither the word nor the concept fits the thing itself exactly. As John T. Matthews (The Play of Faulkner's Language) has noted, Bergson reflects the beginning of modern theory in his insistence that "whatever the mind knows about experience is imperiled by the falsification of symbols, words or concepts" (36). Gail L. Mortimer also has pointed to Bergson's philosophy as the beginning of modern theories concerned with the absence of the real (Loss 43-46; 70-73). Consequently, both refer to Faulkner's expressed agreement with Bergson as a reason for opening Faulkner's texts to modern theory.

The failure of Absalom's characters is the result of what Bergson has defined as the failure of the intellect to grasp the whole of reality or the whole object or "thing" itself. The intellect, Bergson argues, attempts to know the reality of an object through the application of concepts, words and symbols which are mental "re-presentations" of the real and not the thing itself. Rather than approaching reality by imposing these mental constructs onto the object, Bergson has suggested that we attempt to know the thing itself through metaphysical knowledge, or through an intuitive identification with the object which would

allow us to "sink into the absolute which is the object and not its representation, the original and not its translation" (Metaphysics 23). The characters of Absalom, however, attempt to identify their surroundings by symbolical constructs which represent attributes of an object or what Bergson calls those ideas "that we form of the properties of a thing which fail to identify the thing exactly" (Metaphysics 29). The confusion and violence which erupts throughout Absalom is the result of this dependence on the "translation" and denial of the "original," or the substitution of the idea and symbol for the real.

One of Bergson's major metaphysical points is that intellectual, or analytic knowledge only yields partial knowledge of the whole, absolute thing, and the dependence on intellectual knowledge alone leads us into falsely identifying the real object by one or more of these mental attributes or parts. Bergson declares that these mental conceptions, or "partial expressions" which the intellect formulates about the object, "divide the concrete unity of the object into so many symbolical expressions" (Metaphysics 30). Even if we add all of the analytic parts together which the intellect can account for according to the position from which the object is viewed, the sum of intellectual knowledge will never give us more than a "shadow" or "illusion" of the real thing because these partial expressions can "never actually give us more than an artificial reconstruction of the [real, whole] object of which they can only symbolize certain general, and in a way, impersonal aspects. . . ." (Metaphysics 29). By identifying the object through

attributes or parts common to other objects, the absolute and unique reality of the object, which is itself, is lost.

In his Introduction to Metaphysics, Bergson warns that the substitution of the mental concept for the real is a potentially dangerous approach, not only because the concept can never be more than a shadow or illusion, but because all abstractions result in arbitrary overgeneralizations of the whole, unique object.

Bergson argues,

. . . besides the illusion there is also a very serious danger. For the concept generalizes at the same time it abstracts. The concept can only symbolize a particular property by making it common to an infinity of things. It therefore always more or less deforms the property by the extension it gives to it. Replaced in the metaphysical object to which it belongs, a property coincides with the object, or at least molds itself on it, and adopts the same outline. Extracted from the metaphysical object, and presented in a concept, it grows indefinitely larger, and goes beyond the object itself, since henceforth it has to contain it, along with a number of other objects. Thus the different concepts that we form of the properties of a thing inscribe round it so many circles, each much too large and none of them fitting it exactly. . . . so that if we are bent on reconstructing the object with concepts, some artifice must be sought. . . . Everything will depend on the weight we attribute

to this or that concept, and this weight will always be arbitrary, since the concept extracted from the object has no weight, being only the shadow of a body. (29)

The real danger of the intellectual approach to the world, then, arises from the tendency to identify the whole, real "thing" according to whichever "arbitrarily" selected "point of view" or "partial expression" which, by some "artifice," has been argued to properly identify the object.

The identification of a whole "thing" by a single, or few, abstracted parts or common properties, defines the approach of all of Absalom's characters as they attempt to "know," or as Bergson suggests of the role of all mental processes, to "manipulate," reality. Such a manipulation of the real to identify a thing or person according to arbitrarily selected properties also has been noted as a characteristic tendency in formal thinking disorders, particularly schizophrenia.⁸ The attempt to establish an identity of subjects based on shared common attributes, or common properties, was first recognized by E. Von Domarus ("The Specific Laws of Logic in Schizophrenia") as a regulating principle in formal thinking disorders. Employing the use of Vigotsky's definition of the subject of a sentence as that about which something is said and the predicate as that which expresses what is said about the subject, Von Domarus has noted that individuals

⁸ It is the view of many clinical theorists that there is no qualitative distinction between normal and abnormal behavior (including thought and language behavior.), but only a difference in degree, or in other words, a quantitative distinction. See Brendan A. Maher, Principles of Psychopathology. New York: McGraw Hill, 1966. 317.

with disturbed thought processes, particularly schizophrenics, tend to use a type of paralogic which permits them to assume identity based on identical predicates rather than identical subjects. Turning to a well-known syllogism in logic Von Domarus' principle can easily be demonstrated. In the syllogism "All men are mortal, Socrates is a man," the valid conclusion is that Socrates is mortal. The conclusion is valid, as Von Domarus points out, because the subject of the major premiss, "all men," contains the subject of the minor premiss, "Socrates."

However, the syllogism "all men are mortal, Socrates is mortal; therefore Socrates is a man," demonstrates a faulty reasoning based on an identity of predicates.

Without the aid of a logician, one can easily recognize that such a conclusion must be false since "Socrates" here could well be a chicken while still sharing the common attributes or predications of name and mortality with a man. Although many "normals" may assume such a faulty conclusion, the tendency to use this type of thinking has been particularly noted in psychopathology since Von Domarus first outlined his principle. Employing such "logic," the schizophrenic can, for example, identify herself as the Virgin Mary because she shares the same common attributes as name, Mary, and state of virginity with the Mother of God.

Silvano Arieti, a major contributor to the psychiatric literature on thought disturbances, has also noted the application of the Von Domarus principle in the distorted thinking of his patients and suggests that the Von Domarus principle is a "mode of thought which makes reality appear as it is emotionally experienced" (372). Arieti terms this illogical thought process "paleologic," or primitive, child-

like logic in contradistinction to the accepted Aristotelian logic, and notes that the "laws of paleologic can be studied in mythology, customs of ancients, primitives of today, normal children, psychotics and in dreams" (372). Arieti also contends that the use of "paleologic" permits "the individual to make a choice of predicates out of many numerous possibilities [which is] gratifying for the individual or corresponds to his emotional experiences" (374). This same tendency to identify a subject by a single predicate or symbol selected from many possibilities pervades Absalom, and the use of such "paleologic" is indeed used as a means of gratification for those characters in Absalom who employ it. Although Bergson's warning concerning the intellect's tendency to "know" the real thing according to repeatable, common properties was not intended to describe abnormal thought processes, his conclusion about this mode of cognition does not differ from Arieti's conclusions concerning the use of "paleologic," nor do Bergson's remarks differ from Faulkner's portrayal of his character's relationship to their surroundings. Bergson explains,

It must be remembered that the normal work of the intellect is far from being disinterested. We do not aim generally at knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but in order to take sides, to draw profit--in short, to satisfy an interest. We inquire up to what point the object we seek to know is "this" or "that," to what know class it belongs, and what kind of action, bearing, or attitude it should suggest to us. These different possible actions and attitudes are so

many "conceptual directions" of our thought, determined once for all; it remains only to follow them: in that precisely consists the application of concepts to things. To try to fit a concept on an object is simply to ask what we can do with the object, and what it can do for us. To label an object with a certain concept is to mark in precise terms the kind of action or attitude the object should suggest to us. (Metaphysics 39)

In Absalom Faulkner represents the most blatant use of "paleologic" as a defining feature of society which employs such "logic" to deny the whole subject or the human being. Denying the whole individual, society can withhold numerous possible attributes to certain men and women so that these individuals can be regarded as commodities to be used by those powerful enough to determine which attributes, or even single attribute, will serve as an identification for the individual within the social structure. This type of synecdochical identification of the whole individual by a single part, particularly as the color of skin, arises as the central error in Absalom. Faulkner further exposes the fallacy of this logic by presenting the plight of individuals who have lost their rights to be viewed as human beings because their identity is not only based on a single attribute but on a part of a part. Who they are depends on their fraction of black blood and this fraction prescribes their identity, value, and use within the social system. For example, the son of Charles Bon, assumed to be one sixteenth negro, is described by Mr. Compson as "the child, the boy, sleeping in silk and

lace to be sure yet complete chattel of him who, begetting him, owned him body and soul to sell (if he chose) like a calf or puppy or sheep" (A 114). Denied the possibility of being a human subject, a part-black, male child then could no longer share the attribute of "sonship" with his white male counterpart and could more easily be identified with livestock by sharing the common predication of "commodity." Part-black females, as the octoroon mother of Charles Eienne De Saint Velery Bon, are not recognized as women but "creatures." As Mr. Compson imagines Charles Bon attempting to explain his mistress as well as all of the other "marked sparrows" of New Orleans society to the provincial Henry, Mr. Compson imagines Bon as arguing that these females are:

. . . creatures taken at childhood, culled and chosen and raised more carefully than any white girl, any nun, than any blooded mare even, by a person who gives them the unsleeping care and attention which no mother ever gives. For a price, of course, but a price offered and accepted or declined through a system more formal than any that white girls are sold under since they are more valuable as commodities than white girls, raised and trained to fulfill a woman's sole end and purpose: to love, to be beautiful, to divert. (A 117)

Not only is the "being" or identity of a part-black woman reduced to the single predication of "commodity" here, but the identity and existence of all women has been reduced to only three possibilities: to be beautiful, to divert,

and to love. Thomas Sutpen is guilty of a further reduction of female existence and that is his repeated identification of a woman only in terms of "mother of his male heir." The fact that a woman is recognized in no other way by Sutpen becomes obvious in his remark to General Compson. Sutpen explains, "I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family -- incidentally, of course, a wife" (A 263). His refusal to acknowledge his first wife and son because of a certain unnamed "factor" indicates that he identifies a wife and a son on the basis of a few selected predicates which are indeed, as Arieti suggests, "gratifying" to him since they are chosen merely to prove "incremental" to his design. Sutpen's wife and children, legitimate or otherwise, are recognized only as acquisitions or commodities more easily associated with livestock than humanity. For example he tells Wash's granddaughter when she has failed to deliver him a male child, "Well Milly; too bad you're not a mare like Penelope, then I could give you a decent stall in the stable" (A 286). It is Sutpen's repeated blindness to the whole individual and his failure to identify any man, woman, or child as a human being which leads to his violent death.

Thomas Sutpen is, of course, the most easily detected "paleo-logician" in Absalom, formulating his "design" through the confused reasoning of a child reacting with ambivalence to his experience of being turned away from the front door of the plantation by a black servant. He attempts to understand his experience through an argument by analogy which fails to identify properly the

more sophisticated plantation society in terms of the primitive mountain society.⁹ Childishly grasping only the obvious and the material, he bases the identity of the two societies on a common feature, "ownership" within the society. This recognition of identity of subjects based on a common predication, "ownership," is a logic based on young Sutpen's desire for what he covets most in both societies: the "fine rifle" of mountain society and the "fine house" of plantation society. Young Sutpen's unreconciled ambivalence towards a society which both holds what he desires yet insults him is maintained throughout his "reasoning" of what he must do, "what he had to do in order to live with himself" (A 237). His first reaction to the insult is to fight, and using his rifle analogy of mountain society he thinks, "If you were fixing to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first thing you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle you could borrow, or steal, or make, wouldn't it?" (A 238) However, his analogic reasoning based on the common attribute of "ownership" fails to explain how he can fight the plantation owner because young Sutpen wonders, "how in the world could a man fight another man with dressed up niggers and the fact that he could lie in a hammock all afternoon with his shoes off? And what in the world would he be fighting for if he did?" (A 229)

Young Sutpen's reasoning appears to reach the conclusion that it does not make sense to fight the man. His anger and frustration become mitigated by his

⁹ The tendency to think by analogy rather than by cause and effect has been noted by Marià Lorenz as characteristic in schizophrenia. See Language Behavior in Schizophrenia. Ed. Harold Vetter. Springfield: Charles Thomas, 1968. 37.

desire to have what the man has and do what the man does, that is, the childish desire to go without shoes. Consequently, it does not make sense to him to fight that which he wants. Although his "logic" appears to be more dominated by his desires at this point, his ambivalence remains unreconciled; he is still angry and frustrated with his denial from a man who holds all he desires. It is this unreconciled ambivalence which has confused the critics who also wonder how Sutpen's "design" to own what the planter owns could be intended as a plan to "fight" the plantation owner. In one of the latest critical attempts to explain Sutpen's "design," Dirk Kuyk has argued that Sutpen's design is moral in nature, formulated to fight the plantation society by taking that "nameless stranger" into his home, as he later tells General Compson, and raising that child "forever free from brutehood." However, the "nameless stranger" to whom Sutpen refers is himself as a young boy appearing before the eyes of the plantation owner as an unknown, unregarded "stranger," watching the owner lie in the hammock while the owner looked past him, regarding young Sutpen and his kind as "creatures, heavy and without grace." It is himself, the boy watching from the outside as the man lounged on his fine plantation, that Sutpen intends to take "inside" forever, a point made apparent in the continued reasoning of Sutpen as a boy. As the boy's thinking progresses, it becomes obvious that he takes himself "inside" by assuming the identity of the plantation owner. Sutpen's "design," which he formulates after so much arguing with himself, is not structured on a moral

conclusion but rather on an amoral conclusion directed by psychological desire rather than Aristotelian reasoning.

Poised between frustration and desire, uncertain how or why he should fight the man with "dressed up niggers," young Sutpen continues his "reasoning," transforming his desire into a "logical" conclusion which is characteristically primitive. Like a child or primitive, he begins to deduce a psychological intention as the meaning and cause of his recent experience in the same manner that Arieti describes the thinking of a "paleoecologist." Arieti notes that the autistic person like the child and primitive, confuses the physical world with the psychological and "instead of finding a physical explanation of an event, looks for a motivation or an intention as the cause of an event" (36). Young Sutpen finds just such a psychological intent as the meaning behind his insult by concluding that the sole purpose for his being sent with the message to the plantation was so that he could be turned away from the door. Sutpen argues,

He [the black servant] never give me a chance to say it [the message]. And Pap never asked me if I told him or not and so he [the plantation owner] can't even know that Pap sent him any message and so whether he got it or not can't even matter, not even to Pap; I went up to that door for that nigger to tell me never to come to that front door again and I not only wasn't doing any good to him [the plantation owner] by telling it or any harm to him by

not telling it, there ain't any good or harm either in the living world
that I can do to him. (A 238)

Here young Sutpen is postulating a psychological cause behind the event by confusing the reason for his being sent to the plantation with the reason for his psychological affront through the use of a limiting and selective "either/or" argument which falsely instructs him that he either went to the plantation for the purpose of delivering a message or for the purpose of being turned from the door. Illogically he rejects the premiss that the purpose for his being sent was to deliver a message by negating the message as purposeful. He argues that the message itself, the content of which he never knew, could not be purposeful since whatever the message contained it produced neither harm nor good to anyone. Consequently young Sutpen has "reasoned" his way into an amoral conclusion, recognizing "neither harm nor good." Childishly grasping the material, or only what is desirous within the society, he has failed to see any moral implications behind his experience; his being turned away from the plantation door appears to have no meaning or purpose other than what he chooses to give it. The "meaning" becomes purely personal and totally asocial. His reasoning allows him to assign a psychological intent to the whole experience, assuring himself that the recent experience occurred to show him how to transform his purposeless existence, his "being there" at the plantation door without purpose, into purpose for the remainder of his life. The answer to what he must do then erupts upon

him like an "explosion," informing him that "you got to have land and niggers and a fine home to combat them with" (A 238).

Young Sutpen's concluding intention appears ambiguous since he has already argued himself into believing that there is nothing he can do to the man; yet he maintains that he will acquire these possessions to "combat them [those like the man] with." However, the ambiguity here is consistent with his ambivalence, his desire for and frustration with his object, which he appears to have satisfactorily reconciled for himself by childishy disregarding, or failing to abstract, the connotative meaning of the term "getting even with" the man.¹⁰ Apparently he now understands "getting even with" in the most concrete and literal sense of the words; since there is nothing he can do to the man, he can get "even" with him by equalling the sum of his possessions. His intention to acquire what the man has, however, indicates his desire to identify with the planter rather than fight him, and Sutpen's identification process follows the laws of paleologic as described by Arieti. Arieti explains that the schizophrenic, the primitive and the child's identification of himself with another follows this pattern of thinking:

If X will be identified with Y because they have a common quality,
it will be sufficient for me to acquire a quality of the person I want
to be identified with in order to become that person. (34)

¹⁰The failure to abstract beyond the concrete or very literal meaning of a word or phrase has been noted in many studies on thinking disorders and language psychopathology. For a sampling see Arieti, Benjamin, Goldstein, Kasanin, and Maher.

Sutpen's "logic" is easily recognized by Arieti's formula. His assimilation of the planter's identity appears complete in Sutpen's final years as he is seen lying in his hammock while Wash Jones brings him the jug of whiskey. Maintaining his childish amoral grasp of the plantation society, he remains impervious to the moral implications of the social system which turned him from the front door and placed him in clothes more ragged and shacks more dilapidated than black slaves and allowed the planter to lie in the hammock all day with his shoes off while regarding young Sutpen and his family "as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose" (A 235).

Sutpen is permanently blinded to these social realities from childhood by his concluding piece of "logic" which erupts from him "like an explosion--, a bright glare that vanished and left nothing, no ashes nor refuse; just a limitless flat plain with the severe shape of his intact innocence rising from it like a monument, that innocence instructing him [that] you got to have land and niggers and a fine house" (A 238). Pursuing this childhood idea in which he has confused the quality of existence with the quantity of goods, he appears in old age as John Longley has suggested, like "the Old Oedipus who has been blinded since birth but still cannot see his miscalculation" (16). Blinded by the idea which permanently renders him a child, he is unable to develop the sophisticated intuition which would allow him to "sink into the real" and he remains trapped in his representations. As Donald Kartiganer has noted, Sutpen remains a

primitive, "a literalist of the imagination, blind to the arbitrary nature of the symbols of society. To him, the elements of social life--the house, the slaves, the wife, the son, have a magical power [and his accumulation of these become] phases of a ritual that is not symbolic but real" (Fragile Thread 60).

Sutpen relentlessly pursues his course to death in order to see his design "complete itself" through the accumulation of these symbolical elements. Baffled by the multiplicity of experience, Sutpen adheres, as Panthea Broughton asserts, "to a fixed idea which never allows him insight into the changing reality" (54). His idea takes precedence over the real as he continues to deny his experiences by committing the same old mistakes. As Rosa tells Quentin, "[no one or nothing] could have competed with the white glare of his madness [or] compelling dream" (A 166) which left him like

. . . the light-blinded bat-like image of his own torment cast by the fierce demonic lantern up from beneath the earth's crust and hence in retrograde, reverse; from abysmal and chaotic dark to eternal and abysmal dark completing his descending ellipsis, clinging, trying to cling with vain unsubstantial hands to what he hoped would hold him, save him, arrest him. (A 171)

Even if Sutpen is the most easily detected "paleologist" in Absalom, blinded by an idea and childishly (or insanely, as Rosa suggests) thinking that he can identify with those "of purpose" by acquiring what those men have, his own identity as a whole human being is no less submitted to the same "paleologic" by

all who attempt to "know" him. As Philip Weinstein asserts, Sutpen is identified as "a demon, tragic hero, a successful planter, a psychically arrested child, a mountain man and white trash. Who he is depends on where and when you look at him and who is doing the looking" (187). For Rosa, Sutpen is identified only as an "ogre, a demon" who erupted in a "thunderclap" during the sabbath sunshine "upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a school prize water color" (8). Yet Rosa's "demonizing" of Sutpen seems to gratify her own needs because, as Joseph Reed has pointed out, her mythologizing of Sutpen makes what has happened to her bearable (162), and as Harry Campbell suggests, by placing blame on a demon and a curse, she has freed herself of any responsibility (117). Although Rosa's identification of Sutpen by her selective predication of him as a demon is presented first in the novel, the identifications of Sutpen which follow are no less selective and all obscure a grasp of the whole man.

In Mr. Compson's narration, Sutpen appears as a successful planter at the "zenith of his success," as John T. Matthews has noted (138), who is cast by fate from supreme heights to become, as countless critics have recognized, the tragic hero of Greek drama. Sutpen's own stories about himself which he tells General Compson suggest that he sees himself first as a child of the mountains and later, as Dirk Kuyk has asserted, as an adventurer on a quest (88), driven by what Sutpen calls luck, courage and shrewdness. By the time Quentin tells his version, Sutpen is stripped of his potency in earlier portrayals and appears small: a lazy, drunken, old pervert who closes his store in the mid afternoon, drinking himself

comotose in the company of the shiftless Wash Jones and seducing Jones' simple, young granddaughter, Milly, with a few pieces of candy and ribbons. Wash Jones, however, can only see Sutpen as "a fine proud man" (A 282), galloping across his plantation on the black stallion. Wash sees Sutpen in the image of his (Wash's) own-desired likeness, employing his own paleologic to identify with Sutpen in order to deny the unacceptable reality of his own existence. According to Mr. Compson, Wash probably argued his identification with Sutpen by thinking that "the Book said that all men were created in the image of God and so all men were the same in God's eyes anyway, looked the same to God at least, and so he would look at Sutpen and think, *A fine proud man. If God Himself was to come down and ride the natural earth, that's what He would aim to look like* (A 282).

Wash's blindness to the whole man, his logic which Mr. Compson calls "a good deal like Sutpen's, that told him he was right in the face of all fact and usage and everything else" (A 287), and taught him only to see the fine, brave man, leads to Wash's own incomprehensible end as well as Sutpen's. Clinging to the idea, neither Wash nor Sutpen can comprehend the reality of their violent deaths. This same blindness to the whole individual and the whole of reality, however, pervades Absalom and, like Sutpen and Wash, results from mistaking the abstract and the symbolical for the real. As Panthea Broughton has pointed out, Wash is blinded by Sutpen's bronze medals which become "the real representations of bravery to him" (56). Wash also perceives Sutpen's signed

paper from General Lee as the very proof of bravery, assuming that the man who holds the paper must be brave. Wash tells Sutpen, "But you are brave, the same as you are alive and breathing" (A 284). Sutpen, as Wash, also appears to rely on the symbol to establish his monumental success as well as prove his existence, "trusting," as Nancy Blake asserts, "in the symbol while ignorant of the real" (135). Sutpen's incredible and ironic actions to procure and deliver two thousand pounds of Italian marble as tombstones for himself and his wife, making sure that "that much bombastic and inert carven rock" (A 189) is dragged through enemy lines by "starved gaunt men and gaunt spent horses knee deep in icy mud or snow" (A 188), seems to demonstrate Sutpen's need for the symbolical monument to prove his successful existence. Sutpen, however, is not the only one who apprehends the symbolic stones as the real presentation of his life and works. His ragged and shoeless troops jokingly refer to the stones as "Colonel and Mrs. Colonel," yet they persist in performing a task out of all proportion to the time and to reality, making sure that the rock symbol survives even if the men moving it did not, respecting the symbol more than the real. Mr. Compson also suggests that Rosa, who must have seen Sutpen's stone monument sitting in the hallway every day during her wartime stay at Sutpen's Hundred, "doubtlessly read among the lettering more of maiden hope and virgin expectation than she ever told Quentin about" (190), and consequently, being in love with the symbol, was ready to accept a marriage proposal from the man. Throughout Absalom the real and the actual are sacrificed to the abstract and the symbolical. Clytie, the half black

daughter of Thomas Sutpen, and Charles Etienne, the one-sixteenth black son of Charles Bon, assume a symbolical sleeping arrangement with Sutpen's all white daughter, Judith, descending in order from bed to trundle bed to pallet according to the ascending quantity of black blood. It appears, however, that this symbolical sleeping arrangement which imposes less comfort on the descending order of sleepers is not a necessary arrangement in the Sutpen household but a self imposed, symbolical gesture performed by Clytie and Bon's son. Although the social norms of the time would dictate such sleeping arrangements to Clytie and Charles Etienne, Judith attempts to take the young boy into her own bed as she did as a child when she slept in the same bed with Clytie. In spite of the indications that Judith has consistently rebelled against the symbolical social structures of her time, neither Clytie nor Bon's young son can drop the symbolical color coding and allow Judith to be their sister or aunt. Judith also never seems to be regarded as an actual individual by Bon and Henry but only as an idea of the two of what each thought the other to be. Mr. Compson believes that Judith "was just the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them [Charles and Henry] strove to preserve, not the illusion of himself nor the illusion of the other, but what each conceived the other to believe him to be" (A 120). Bon and Henry's actions, then, were not for the sake of the actual Judith, or the actual man behind the name of Charles Bon or Henry Sutpen, but for the sake of the idea.

Of all of the Absalom characters, Charles Bon's existence appears to be the most dependent on the idea rather than the actual man. Mr. Compson calls Bon the "curious one," partly because he cannot understand the involvement of a sophisticated New Orleans' man, older than both Henry and Judith, with the provincial youths from Mississippi, but mainly because no one, including General Compson or Rosa, seems to have ever seen Bon except for the Sutpen family. Of those who did see him, no one seems to have grasped the actual man behind the idea each had of him. It is understood that Henry presented the idea of Bon to Judith in his letters from school, wooing Judith to Henry's idea of Bon long before Judith met the actual man. Ellen saw Bon merely as a prestigious acquisition:

She spoke of Bon as if he were three inanimate objects in one, or perhaps one inanimate object for which she and her family would find three concordant uses; a garment which Judith might wear as she would a riding habit or a ball gown, a piece of furniture which would complement and complete the furnishings of her house and position, and a mentor and example to correct Henry's provincial manners and speech and clothing. (A 75)

Ellen presents the "fairytale" (A 76) notion of Judith's and Bon's engagement to Rosa who immediately absorbs the idea of a fairytale romance, participating, as Mr. Compson says, "vicariously" in her niece's awakening to love. Rosa attempts to reify her romantic ideas through the actions of Judith, spying

on Judith in her bedroom and retracing the steps of the "lovers" long departed from the scene, gazing at what she imagines to be Bon's "thigh prints" in the empty seat, a sign which she accepts as living proof of her idea of the man. As Mr. Compson correctly guesses, Rosa "got the picture from the first word, perhaps from the name Charles Bon" (A 75). As Rosa tells her "demonic" tale about Sutpen in the first chapter and attempts to excuse herself from her involvement with Sutpen in chapter five, it becomes apparent that "the word," the symbolical substitute for the concrete thing, takes precedence over reality for Rosa.

It is, of course, Rosa's absorption in and by the word which allows her to deny an intolerable reality by "re-presenting" it, embellishing the real with what critics have called "bombastic rhetoric" (Blake 133), "baroque prolixity" (Mathews 22), or as Warwick Waddleton has asserted, a "thickened web of language [which] flickers over important matters [and] pauses garrulously over apparent common places [while] deferring meaning" (215). The "word" gives Rosa power to re-present the actual in terms of what she calls the "might-have-been," which for her, is "more true than truth." Her absorption in the "might-have-been" renders her existence dream-like where the shocking realities of her experiences intrude incomprehensibly, waking the dreamer "who says not, 'Did I but dream?' but rather says, indicts high-heaven's very self with: 'Why did I wake since waking I shall never sleep again?'" (A 143). In spite of the shocking intrusion of reality,

Rosa attempts to return to the dream by transforming these intrusions into a reality created by the power of her words.

Infatuated with the word and the power its usage seems to give, Rosa, at times, appears to be like those children and autistics whom Arieti describes as being attracted to a word on its purely concrete level of verbalization, denying the word's symbolical or abstract usage. Arieti explains that these individuals often attach a sense of magic to the sound of the word, believing that saying the word will give them the power to evoke the presence of a thing.¹¹ After hearing the name "Charles Bon" from Ellen, Rosa repeats the name to herself three times, each time adding an idea of the man to the name in hopes of bringing the absent Bon into her presence. She chants, "Charles Bon, Charles Good, Charles Husband-soon-to-be" (A 148) as she lurks in the garden where she thinks the lovers strolled, noting the "invisible imprint" of the "absent" (A 148) Bon. By articulating the name and positing an idea of the man behind the name, she feels that she can possess Bon more fully than Judith could possess the actual man. Her desire to possess the actual thing totally by possessing the word or the idea becomes apparent when she offers the possibility that Charles Bon never had any other existence than the one given by her, and therefore, belonged to her because she had created him. In her discursive explanations of herself in chapter five she declares,

¹¹Freud also notes the child's sense of power in using words to evoke a presence. See his discussion of his nephew's "fort-da" game in The Complete Works. Vol 18. 3-64.

But I never saw it [the face of Bon]. I do not even know of my own knowledge that Ellen ever saw it, that Judith ever loved it, that Henry slew it: so who will dispute me when I say, Why did I not invent, create it? (A 147)

Her belief that if she can "articulate" the word, she can possess "the thing" becomes more evident in her explanation for losing Sutpen. Rosa declares:

But I forgave him. They will tell you different, but I did. Why shouldn't I? I had nothing to forgive; I had not lost him because I never owned him; . . . I never owned him; certainly not in that sewer sense which you would mean by that and maybe think (but you are wrong) I mean. That did not matter . . . I mean that he was not owned by anyone or anything in this world, had never been, would never be, not even by Ellen, not even by Jones' granddaughter. Because he was not articulated in this world. (A 171)

Rosa's reasoning here that the man cannot be possessed if he is not "articulated" in this world is a clue to her "summons" for Quentin to come and listen to her story. Obviously she hopes to tell the Sutpen story so that she can bring the man into existence by the invocation of the word. Yet her voice "vanishes" and "ceases" before Quentin, or floods the ear with hysterical outpourings, particularly in chapter five where her words lead away rather than toward the object. In his radical psychoanalysis based on Freud's comment that

the unconscious is structured like a language and Saussure's analysis of the linguistic sign as a signifier of a word/concept with no real objective referent, Jacques Lacan insists that the acquisition of language always involves a substitution of a word for a desired object. However, since the word is always a substitute for a thing desired, the language becomes a demand for a lost object. Accordingly, Rosa's attempts to seek gratification through her inventions leave her frustrated because the only objects of her desires are words which fail to evoke the real Sutpen. In chapter five Rosa explains that she can never forgive Sutpen "for being dead" (A 170) because being dead he has robbed her of her desire for "the man who was wrong to admit it [that he was wrong]" (A 170). Her words become a demand for Sutpen "to show" through the word that he was wrong. Since she cannot bring the absent Sutpen into presence, she transfers her demand onto Quentin through her demonic tale in chapter one and in what Warwick Waddington calls Rosa's "apologia" in chapter five where she tells Quentin, "But no matter [what everyone says about herself and Sutpen], I will tell you what he [Sutpen] did and let you be the judge" (A 166).

Rosa promises in her "apologia" to say those "bold blank naked and outrageous words just as he [Sutpen] spoke them" (A 167), but every time she moves closer to giving Sutpen's insulting words she avoids "the thing" and defers the "naked word" through a verbal presentation of her own desires, insisting on her "root and urge, . . . [the] gnarled forgotten root (which might have bloomed yet) with some globed concentrate more globed and concentrate and heady-

perfect" (A 144). Even after she has presented all possible reasons for her involvement with Sutpen, pretending to reject them all as invalid excuses while actually excusing herself by showing all the justifiable reasons she can conceive, she still fails to give the words of Sutpen's insult which she claims will judge him wrong and her right. It is Shreve who provides Sutpen's "naked words" by supposing that Sutpen suggested that he and Rosa "first breed together" to see if they could produce a male heir before they marry.

Failing to say "the thing" and failing to satisfy her desire with the verbal substitution, Rosa's frustration is increased. Her increased frustration for the lost object is signaled by her increased prolixity in which she puts more demand on the word to "show itself" and be recognized concretely as a "word thing." Her "apologia" becomes more and more marked by a baroque convolution of the language which impedes the communicable matter through an accretion of words. Although her verbal displays may merely be considered poor poetic attempts, her language shares the same characteristics noted by Arieti and others (Benjamin, Vetter, et al.) in autistic speech such as the use of neologisms, bizarre metaphors, and clanging or rhyming sounds, all assumed to be the result of the individual's attraction to the sound of the word rather than the word's connotative meaning. Rosa coins such eccentric and repetitive sounding phrases as "no summer's caesarean lack" and "unwived widow," along with countless other neologisms often resulting from the negation of a word's connotative meaning such as her creation of the word "not- husband." In an accretion of repetitive sounds, she

metaphorically refers to herself as "all polymath love's androgenous advocate" (A 146) and Sutpen's Hundred as the "cocoon-casket marriage bed of youth."

Countless examples of these word accretions flood her speech in chapter five, indicating an hysterical outpouring of words syntactically arranged according to the repetition of sounds rather than meaning. Although her language may not be completely identified with the "clang" associations of psychotics, her word usage fails to demonstrate the skillful use of alliteration by poets. Rather than indicating a poetic ability to express an idea, Rosa's use of repetitions suggests a failure to understand, or "get at," the "thing" she wishes to present. As the following excerpt from chapter five demonstrates, the "thing" she wishes to express either escapes her word choices or becomes buried beneath her verbal accretions. Trying to explain the "sickness somewhere at the prime foundation" of existence, she says,

. . . the prisoner soul, miasmal-distillant, wroils ever upward
sunward, tugs its tenuous prisoner arteries and veins and prisoning
in its turn that spark, that dream which, as the globy [globy?] and
complete instant of its freedom mirrors and repeats (repeats?
creates, reduces to a fragile evanescent iridescent sphere) . . . relicts
[re-licks? a relict? reluct?] the seething and anonymous miasmal
mass, [and so forth] (A 143)

It appears that Rosa even briefly recognizes her "repetitions" for she pauses briefly to question her use of the word "repeat" but decides to substitute

"create" for repeat, continuing with her tangential outpourings. Although Rosa claims that she has "endured without rhyme or reason" (A 146), it becomes obvious that she has sacrificed reason for the rhyme as well as reality for the embellished word. Avoiding the "naked word," Rosa clothes both herself and Sutpen in vast metaphorical imagery hoping to prove herself right and Sutpen wrong, particularly by showing through her diction that she was the only possible "right" woman for Sutpen because of her propensity for the idea and the dream. She depicts Sutpen as a man in "titan conflict," sparked by the "divine" madness of his idea or dark dream to which she feels she could function as his "sun" (A 168), casting only a ray of "light" while taking none of his space. She declares, "O furious mad old man, I hold no substance that will fit your dream but I can give you airy space and scope for your delirium" (168). Believing that both she and Sutpen can exist in and for the idea, she fails to recognize that the idea which drives Sutpen demands "substances"; he needs to possess objects, the fine house, the land, slaves and family, which would reify his dream or "design." Rosa's utter failure to understand Sutpen, or even grasp the nature or desire behind the dark dream, is ironically exposed through the usage of her metaphorical language. Three times she proclaims, "I was that sun [who could provide light and radiation for the idea]" (A 167-168), disclosing her total ignorance to the fact that Sutpen wanted a son, not a "sun." Consequently, absorbed in the words, Rosa becomes, as James A. Snead has noted, her "own narrative victim" (105). The fact that her words have failed her becomes apparent in the close of chapter five as she is left

repeating three times, the clanging children's rhyme, "Rosie Coldfied, lose him weep him, caught a man but couldn't keep him" (A 168, 170, 171).

Rosa's absorption in the word casts her as a prime example for Bergson's warning that the language obscures the real and Lacan's later insistence that the word is always a demand for a lost object which can never be recovered through the signifying network of language. However, Rosa is not the only character in Absalom who falls prey to the web of language and becomes trapped in the word. The Gerald Langford study of Faulkner's manuscript shows that it was Faulkner's original intention to make the language at fault for Sutpen's initial mistake. The original passage read:

[Sutpen was] in a country [Haiti] and among a people now whose very language he had to learn and where because of this he was to make that mistake which if he had acquiesced to it would not have been an error and which, since he refused to be stopped by it, became his doom." (Langford 9)

Although Faulkner struck this passage from the text, Absalom still strongly suggests that Sutpen's repudiation of his first wife was the result of his inability to understand the French language used by the Haitian planter and his daughter. Sutpen tells Grandfather Compson that when he left the Virginia plantation for the West Indies to fulfill his dream, "he discovered that all people did not speak the same tongue and realized that he would not only need courage and skill, he would have to learn to speak a new language" (A 240). Grandfather Compson

also appears to support Sutpen's intimation that part of his problem was his failure to understand the language, but also adds a commentary which suggests that all mankind suffers from the inability of language to render human needs. Grandfather Compson explains that Sutpen oversaw the Haitian plantation, "while he learned the language (that meager and fragile thread, Grandfather said, by which the little surface corners and edges of men's secret and solitary lives may be joined for an instant now and then before sinking back into the darkness where the spirit cried for the first time and was not heard and will cry for the last time and will not be heard either" (A 251). Perhaps, as Grandfather Compson suggests, Sutpen's error resides in the nature of language, but his guilt resides in his failure to hear "the cry." Although Sutpen apparently did not need to know much of the language to give orders on the Haitian plantation, his failure to know the language appears minimal compared to his inability to recognize the cry of the natives who worked over "a soil manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation until it sprang with an incredible paradox of peaceful greenery and crimson flowers and sugar cane . . . " (A 251). Sutpen failed to recognize "the cry" which did not even need to be uttered in human language to be understood when he rode over the plantation, "not knowing that what he rode upon was a volcano, hearing the air tremble and throb at night with the drum and chanting and not knowing that it was the heart of the earth itself he heard . . . " (A 251). Sutpen never comprehended the symbolical gestures, the drumbeats and chants at night, or the "pig's bone with a

little rotten flesh, and stained dirty rag with a few pebbles tied up in it on the planter's pillow" (A 252) until he, and the planter, and the planter's daughter were under siege by the natives. Under siege, he appears to recognize the ominous threats behind the symbolical gestures, but he still fails to hear the cry of the oppressed natives behind the symbol, an error in hearing which he obviously repeats with the wife he gains through his ability to repress the threats. Walking out of the barricaded house, Sutpen subdues the insurgents, possibly by "yelling louder or standing more" (A 254) than they, although no one knows how, and gains the planter's daughter, although Sutpen never says how the betrothal comes about. As Grandfather Compson explains, Sutpen never talked much about his experience in Haiti except to mention "the patois he had to learn in order to oversee the plantation, and the French he had to learn, maybe not to get engaged to be married, but which he would certainly need to be able to repudiate the wife after he had already got her" (A 248), a comment which suggests that Sutpen believed that he had been tricked into marriage with a woman who, for some factor he refused to name, could not be "incremental to his design" because of his inability to comprehend the language. However, even if Sutpen's error was his failure to understand the word, his guilt still rests in his failure to hear "the cry," first in the oppressed of the Virginia plantation society, then the oppressed in Haitian society, and in the wife who must have cried out, but whose cries were "outyelled" in Sutpen's ear by the name of the thing which

Sutpen would divulge to no man and which made the woman "not incremental to the forwarding of his design."

All of Absalom's characters appear to share in Sutpen's guilt, not only in failing to see the human being behind the symbol but also in failing to hear the human voice behind the word. As Warwick Waddleton asserts, "the voice of an outraged woman dominates the novel's beginning and sets the pattern for the rest of the novel" (178). All of the novel's voices, including young Sutpen's at the plantation door, "expect to be heard," and cry out to be heard in a voice of outrage. Apparently their demands to be heard are not met, judging by the hysterical outpouring of words which fail to bring the lost object of their desire, whether for Sutpen it be his lost selfhood, or the lost Sutpen for Rosa, or the lost objects of the story for the narrators, into presence. Rather than being "heard," with the demand for acknowledgement returned, the need met, Quentin, for example, is certain that he shall always have to do the hearing, subjected forever to the "loud voices" which drown out his own need to be heard. As Warwick Waddleton asserts, Absalom presents an "interlock of outcry and speech, of the howled and the unspeakable" (178). The ultimate reduction of human speech, and the ultimate "word" given on the Sutpen story, is the howl produced by the idiot, Jim Bond, "the scion, the last of his race" (A 378) as fire consumes not only the old Sutpen house but Clytie and Henry as well. Even as the howl, which at first seemed to come from a "creature" without "human reason", appears to be recognized as a human cry, the real being behind the voice escapes:

--and he, Jim Bond, . . . , seeing it [the fire consuming Clytie and Henry] too now and howling with human reason now since now even he could have known what he was howling about. But they couldn't catch him. They could hear him; he didn't seem to ever get any further away but they couldn't get any nearer and maybe in time they could not even locate the direction anymore of the howling. (A 376)

It is this inability of Absalom's narrators and characters "to catch" the real thing behind the symbol or the word which leads to the tragic failure in Absalom. However, in spite of the tragic failure of Absalom's characters, the novel does suggest a possible hope in what Morris Benja calls Rosa's "illumination of touch" (58). Ironically, Rosa, who appears most ensnared in the word and the idea, recognizes the problem and suggests an answer. When Clytie attempts to stop Rosa from running up the stairs to see Judith and the slain body of Charles Bon, Rosa declares, "we seemed to glare at one another not as two faces but as the two abstract contradictions which we actually were, neither of our voices raised, as though we spoke to one another free of the limitations and restrictions of speech and hearing" (A 138). However, it is not the exchange of words, the symbolical representations of the real, which allows Rosa to penetrate through the abstract to the real, but the feel of "that black arresting and untimorous hand on [her] white woman's flesh" (A 139). With the feel of Clytie's hand on her arm, Rosa recognizes that "there is something in the touch of flesh . . . which

cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering [straight to] the citadel of the central I-am's private own" (A 139). However, Rosa's "illumination" is only temporary, for she turns back to the symbolical constructs of her society also built into the language which taught her as a child "to listen before [she] could comprehend and to understand before [she] ever heard" (A 140), and also "taught [her] not only to instinctively fear [Clytie] and what she was, but to shun the very objects which she touched" (A 140). Rosa tells Clytie, "Take your hand off me, nigger" (A140). Obviously sinking back into the snare of the word, the symbol, Rosa loses her "touch" with the real woman and declares that the words were not spoken to "her," the "negro," the "woman," but to "it" or what Rosa ambiguously refers to as an ungendered, "unbending will." Apparently Rosa has recognized that "nigger" has no denotative or connotative reference to a woman in the particular, or mankind in general, but to a "thing" of the mind. Rosa's epiphany, as the failure of Absalom's characters who trust the symbol and the "propensity of the mind," supports Bergson's insistence that the real "thing" must be recognized intuitively from the inside rather than externally superimposing mental constructs onto the real thing itself.

The tragic failure of Absalom's characters to grasp reality is the result of their attempts to know the real, whole object or thing by comparing or contrasting it to another thing or identifying the whole thing by a single attribute or part. As Bergson argues, such an attempt to know the real by approaching

the object relatively obscures a grasp of the absolute thing because the whole thing becomes identified by one of its parts, or the object becomes identified by what it is not rather than by what it is. In Absalom, one of the most apparent failures of this relativist approach is seen in the comparison and contrast of black to white. The color black is understood not as itself, but in terms of its contrast to white. In other words, black is "known" as black because it is not white or because it is recognized as the opposite of white. In the same manner, white is "known" as white because of its absence of dark or black. Applying this relativist approach to a whole human being, a white person is identified as lacking in dark or black, and this lack includes any fractional component. By identifying a human being by a single attribute as the color of the skin or racial heritage, the individual can then be arranged into the whole signifying social network according to the rules of comparison and contrast; the role and rights of blacks, then, can be contrasted to that of whites. What becomes apparent is that such a relativist approach should be most gratifying to the most powerful group particularly because, as Bergson argues, intellectual relativism is an attempt to freeze the mobility of life into static, repeatable, and changeless conceptions in order to "manipulate" reality into a commodity. No doubt such an intellectual approach was especially suitable to the patriarchal society of the pre-war South which could recognize a woman as "not a man" and later born sons as "not the first born," and consequently, prescribe the legal rights of these individuals according to the laws of comparison and contrast.

Even young Sutpen must have grasped these mechanisms of society because Sutpen claims that he first believed that who you were depended on "luck," such as the luck which determined "where you were spawned" and who your parents were. Later he came to believe that "shrewdness" might supersede luck in some cases, particularly in the case of becoming rich in spite of the fact of being born poor. However, what Sutpen never realized was that neither luck nor shrewdness was the primary factor in the mechanisms of the social identification process. Rather, the decisive factor was set by the intellectualism which selected the single attribute or attributes which represented the whole individual and which one, luckily, might be born with, as the attribute of having white skin, or being a male, or being the first born son, or shrewdly acquire, as wealth and possessions. Yet Sutpen is not the only character who fails to perceive this intellectual error. All of Absalom's characters, as well as its narrators, appear to be guilty of attempting to identify the whole person or thing by a single attribute, word, or idea, and in the process, obscure the absolute whole thing by "re-presenting" it with a mental construct, abstracted from the ever changing reality.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout his philosophical works, Bergson consistently called upon *Metaphysics* to reverse its traditional approach to reality by placing intuition before analysis. Only acts of intuition, Bergson argued, could grasp what was unique about an object, and thus should hold logical priority over mental action which seeks homogeneity, or what is repeatable in the world. "Thinking," Bergson declared, "usually consists in passing from concepts to things, and not [how we should approach the world] from things to concepts" (*Metaphysics* 38). In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson noted that the whole of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* establishes one fact, "that our intellect is incapable of anything but Platonizing--that is, of pouring all possible experience into pre-existing molds" (59). Although Bergson agreed that the operations of the brain performed a necessary function for survival by allowing us to group things together for practical use, he also saw the serious threat posed to the real through such an intellectualization of the world; thought easily could become substituted for nature and all experience merely could become a "verification for clear ideas" (*Metaphysics* 58). Convinced that *Metaphysics* should concern itself first with what is real before what is usable, Bergson argued that "the single aim of the philosopher should be to promote a certain effort [towards an intuition of the real], which in most men is usually fettered by habits of mind" (*Metaphysics* 27).

It becomes obvious that Faulkner attempted to break through the dependence on conceptualization in Absalom as Bergson had called upon philosophers to do in his Metaphysics. Bergson had suggested that one way to free the mind from its conceptual representation of the real and promote intuition of the thing in its absolute, was to represent things in "images as dissimilar as possible," all requiring "from the mind the same kind of attention, and in some sort the same degree of tension [so that we could] prevent anyone of them from usurping the place of intuition" (Metaphysics 28). Tension, at least, would convince us that no single symbol nor combination of abstractions could be substituted for the real thing itself. Bergson also had pointed out in his Metaphysics that even if we intellectually circled an object, with the circle composed of so many different, successive points of view, we would never gain a true knowledge of the real thing because each point of view lay outside of the object, and thus, since the points were extrinsic to the thing itself, no addition of points could reproduce the whole real object. Absolute knowledge was possible only through a "coincidence" with the thing itself, through what is intrinsic to the object, not extrinsic. Here appears to be the key to Faulkner's construction of Absalom. The Sutpen material is presented from successive points of view as each narrator presents different images of the same characters and arrives at different conceptualizations of what actually happened. However, no one narrative part of Absalom, or conceptual view, can account for the whole, nor

nor does any one view hold priority over another, nor do all of the parts add up to produce the whole truth.

The use of successive points of view to render the same action, or "reality," is not unique to Absalom. Faulkner had successfully employed such a technique previously in two major works, The Sound and the Fury (1929) and As I Lay Dying (1930), although neither of the earlier novels had so ostensibly set out to establish the "truth" about the events covered as did Absalom. Faulkner had divided The Sound and the Fury into four major sections in which the events in the lives of the Compson family were given through the eyes of one of the Compson children, the idiot Benjy, the suicidal Quentin, and the frustrated Jason. One of the most influential Compson children, Caddy, was not given her own section. The final section of the novel, instead of being presented through the eyes of the fourth Compson child, is delivered from the standpoint of an impersonal, omniscient narrator. In As I Lay Dying, Faulkner escalated the number of points of view as well as the number of divisible sections. The novel is divided into fifty-nine sections with each section revealing a view from one of the novel's seventeen characters.

What is common to Absalom and the two earlier novels is that the central figures and major issues dissolve among the succession of views, leaving us with no absolute representation of what is being presented or what has occurred. For example, from the sum of narrative views in Absalom Sutpen appears as a collection of contradictory images, and his "design," which so many critics have

tried to piece together into a whole that would explain all of the events, exists in the text only as incongruous fragments refusing cohesion. Charles Bon is even more of a shadowy figure than Sutpen, and his murder, like his life, remains a mystery through the novel's final pages. John T. Matthews, noting the impossibility of coherence in many of Faulkner's works, has asserted that "the kernel of the [Faulkner] story is precisely what vanishes [in the text]" (The Play of Language 21). He notes, for example, that Caddy, central to The Sound and the Fury because she dominates her brothers' memories, never gains a "presence" in the text, and like the suicide of Quentin or murder of Charles Bon, "vanishes into the words which describe them" (21).

The central figure of As I Lay Dying, the mother, Addie Bundren, also fails to be defined precisely in the text; whether she is a harsh, isolated woman, a stranger to her family, or a giving, loving mother is uncertain. In spite of the fact that her presence is felt most acutely in her absence, or in her death, she appears like Thomas Sutpen, to be the instrument of her family's present condition. It is because of her desire to be buried forty miles away from the Bundren farm in the town of Jefferson that her family has been propelled on a journey, which like Addie herself, is of uncertain significance. We never know if the novel's ongoing journey, undertaken by her family to bury the decaying body of Addie, is meant to be a representation of actions heroic, selfish, grim, comic or merely stupid in nature. It is more likely, as Bergson has suggested about any object of intellectual scrutiny, that we can never exhaust the conceptual points of reference

from which we view the "thing." Further, it becomes apparent that the accumulation of views rendered can never be summed up to reconstruct the reality of the journey, nor can any one element be abstracted and substituted for the whole thing.

So far, only three works have been cited to show Faulkner's use of the Bergsonian point that no number of conceptual parts can be added together to reconstruct the absolute whole object. However, many of Faulkner's works exhibit this same structural use of multiple perspectives, or parts, where the parts tend to disrupt a sense of unity of a "center" element which can account for the entire novel. Light in August, for example, consists of three major parts: the story of Joe Christmas and his murder of Joanna Burden, Reverend Gail Hightower's life in Jefferson and his obsession with his grandfather's ghost, and the growing relationship between Byron Bunch and Lena Grove. Since the novel's first publication critics have strongly suspected that these three parts barely fit together into a unified whole. To further complicate the unity of these parts, the parts become even more divisible by the use of multiple time perspectives as well as character perspectives. Towards the end of the novel, Faulkner adds new perspectives which subtract from any clear idea previously formulated. The townspeople and the lawyer, Gavin Stevens, unsuccessfully attempt to explain the behavior of Joe Christmas, but we never know if Christmas' actions revolve around his disgust of religion, women, or himself. To further split the issue, we never know for sure if Christmas, like Charles Bon, is

partially black, and consequently, whether or not his confused black-white identity is the primary reason for his behavior or merely a symptom or symbol for a deeper fissure at the core of his personality. Near the end of the novel and after Christmas' arrest, the outlook of a character new to the novel, Percy Grimm, is added. Grimm's life revolves around a code of law and order which he finds most idealized in the role of military police. However, in spite of his rules of dress, discipline, and tactics, the outcome of his game (Faulkner calls him "the Player") is not the restoration of law, but irrational slaughter. It is Grimm who finds it necessary to castrate Christmas, the reason for which not even the men who have aided Grimm in his "game" can understand, let alone the reader. The final chapter introduces another new character, the travelling-furniture dealer who picks up Lena and Byron on the road out of town. His perspective on Byron and Lena closes the novel with Lena's simple-minded comment on reaching Tennessee, "My. My. A body does get around." Not only is the brutal life and murder of Joe Christmas and Hightower's spiritual wrestling with his ghosts left behind, as well as undermined by this closing comment of Lena's, but the impact of what the novel has contained is diminished by placing the final chapter into the hands of the furniture dealer. He closes the novel with his account to his wife about "an experience [picking up Lena and Byron] which he had on the road, which interested him at the time and which he considered amusing enough to repeat" (Light in August 468). The last chapter, then, turns

the novel into an amusing anecdote. No "clear idea" emerges as a view of the whole; the parts and perspectives remain at odds.

Walter J. Slatoff (Quest for Failure, 1961) was probably the first major critic to come to the conclusion that none of the pieces of Faulkner's works fit together neatly like the parts of a puzzle which form a whole picture. In addition to the novels previously discussed, Slatoff noted that in four major works, The Unvanquished, The Hamlet, Go Down Moses, and The Town, Faulkner had chosen a form inherently at odds with itself, being "somewhere between that of the novel and that of a collection of short stories" (Quest 203). Slatoff explained that the construction of these books

. . . is a form which allows the reader to speculate about the relationship between stories but does not require any sort of integration or resolution. It is significant, also, that except for The Unvanquished [possibly no exception], each of these books ranges in tone from high seriousness to farce and that each book ends in such a way as to complicate one's response to the rest of the book. (Quest for Failure 203)

While other critics of the times set about to establish, to use Bergson's words, "a thread of pure homogeneity" in Faulkner's works by proving a particular point of view which held the individual texts together, Slatoff adamantly proclaimed that almost any point of view could be found in Faulkner's writings while no one view satisfied the scope of the entire work. Rather than

affirming the existence of any one particular idea, Slatoff suggested that all of Faulkner's works remained in a state of "insoluble suspensions." Unable to pronounce the center of any literary work as non-existent like later day critical theory, Slatoff concluded that tension itself lay at the center of all of Faulkner's works.

It will be remembered that tension from conflicting images and conflicting points of view is the course which Bergson had recommended to loosen the mind from the fetters of Platonism, that is, the tendency to pour all experience into pre-existing molds, so that the path to intuition could be opened. The role of intuition, which transcended brain functioning, was to grasp the uniqueness of a "thing" so that the "thing" could be known in its absolute, that is, as itself rather than how the "thing" related to, or compared to other "things," or how the "thing" could be divided into so many repeatable, inflexible, expressions. By presenting his fictional worlds through numerous points of view which never sum up into a single truth, or single "clear idea," Faulkner has brought the limits of conceptualization to attention. When we complete a Faulkner work we recognize a tension among the perspectives, and this tension informs us that we only have been given numerous representations of the "thing" while the "thing" as it really is, or as Bergson explains, the "thing" as it is "perfectly itself" (Metaphysics 23), escapes us; all knowledge provided in the text remains relative. However, to establish that Faulkner presents his fiction through multiple points of reference is to demonstrate his use of Bergson's philosophy in its most general sense. It is

necessary to bring some of the more specific elements in Bergson's thought to the surface in Faulkner's works in order to make Bergsonian philosophy a valid criterion for the study of Faulkner. Faulkner's works must also show a treatment of Bergson's most important points, particularly emphasizing that time, or continuous flux and change, is what is real; when the sense of flux and change is lost, or when we only apprehend static and solidified shapes, we have lost a sense of what is real. In spite of the limits of our mental processes, however, there is a way in which we can gain an "intellectual sympathy" (Metaphysics 23), not a mere emotional response, of the flux of time, and this is through intuition of our conscious selves. Consciousness informs us of memory, or "pure recollection." In any act of consciousness we have a perception of the past and future through memory and anticipation, or in other words, consciousness is a perception of succession. By directly intuiting ourselves we will apprehend a personality which, in any given perception, exists as a whole while ceaselessly changing through the flow of time. The personality endures as a whole through the accumulation of successive perceptions, or through an interpenetration of time where the past, through memory, is carried into the present and on towards the future. Since there is an integration of time in any single perception, no conscious state can ever be a repetition of a previous state because to each new successive state is added the memory of a past state. Thus repetition belongs to the illusion of conceptual thought, not to reality; consciousness informs us of expansion and change.

From this summary, it should become apparent that when we have been unable to grasp the fluid nature of time, we have failed to grasp what is real. Further, the inability to grasp what is real appears to be a result of the inability to directly apprehend the self in its whole, but continuous and heterogeneous flux. As Bergson explains, "If a man is incapable of getting for himself the intuition of the constitutive duration of his own being, nothing will ever give it to him, concepts no more than images" (Metaphysics 27). Faulkner's characters which seem most doomed to failure appear to be those incapable of grasping this "constitutive duration of their own being." These doomed characters also fail to grasp the flux of life outside of themselves, and consequently, exhibit a tendency to deny change. Such a denial of the real and mobile nature of reality is often manifest in their intellectual efforts to stop time's mobility by equating time with notions of math and space. A symptom of this intellectual error arises as a sense of doom in which a character believes that he shall be assaulted forever by repetition, denied the possibility of freedom and uniqueness. Like Joe Christmas in Light of August, these characters feel that their lives lead to a destined point, often sensing, like Christmas before he murders Joanna Burden, "something is going to happen. Something is going to happen to me" (110). Like Christmas also, their lives appear to be a repetition of "a thousand streets [which] ran as one street" (210). For them, the passage of time equals the amount of space covered, with time ending as their own lives, at some mathematically reduced or divisible point. For example, the life of Christmas, from the time he is betrayed

by the waitress Bobby until his meeting with Joanna Burden, is described in terms of this confusion of time with space, with his life not rendered as conscious growth but in terms of a one way street leading to Joanna in Jefferson, Mississippi:

The street ran into Oklahoma and Missouri and as far south as Mexico and then back north to Chicago and Detroit and then back south again and at last to Mississippi. It was fifteen years long.

(Light in August 21)

This same faulty assessment of time as space also seems to be a mental attitude which contributes to Quentin's sense of repetition and loss in The Sound and the Fury. His suicide, then, could be said to be the result of his inability to place himself within time, in the Bergsonian sense. Unlike Bergson, to be in time for Quentin is to be "worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels" (Sound and Fury 60), or to lose something of the self with each displaced moment rather than to grow, or as Bergson insists in Creative Evolution, "to go on creating oneself endlessly." As Quentin's section opens, he announces that he "was in time again" when he knew that it was between seven and eight o'clock and he could hear the ticking of his watch. Time for Quentin, then, is not continuous mobility but the occupation of a point in space, "between seven and eight," where each point becomes mathematically distanced and displaced with the ticking of the watch. The indication that Quentin has been so obsessed from childhood with the ticking of his watch, the counting off of time, that he has

become removed from the reality surrounding him is reflected in his memory of his school days. Quentin remembers that he would

. . . begin counting until the clock struck three. Then I would begin, counting to sixty and folding down one finger and thinking of the other fourteen fingers waited to be folded down, or thirteen or twelve or eight or seven, until all of a sudden I'd realize silence and the unwinking minds, and I'd say "Ma'am?" "Your name is Quentin, isn't it?" Miss Laura said. Then more silence and the cruel unwinking minds and hands jerking into the silence. . . . then the minds would go away, and after a while I'd be afraid I was going too fast and I'd slow up, then I'd get afraid and count fast again. So I never could come out even with the bell, and the released surging of feet moving already, . . . and my insides would move, sitting still. Moving sitting still. (Sound and Fury 68-9)

By placing himself within a time conceived of in terms of math and space, Quentin becomes reduced to a paradox, an immobility in the midst of mobility.

Quentin's inability to put himself in time, or to move with the flux of life, is reflected in the image of a gull which appears three times in his section in The Sound and the Fury. When Quentin breaks his watch, hoping to "stop time," he notices that the hands of the watch "were extended, slightly off the horizontal at a faint angle, like a gull tilting into the wind" (66). Later, while on a streetcar moving across the streets of Cambridge, he sees a gull which appears to be

frozen between the masts of a ship, "a gull motionless in midair, like on an invisible wire between the masts" (69). As Quentin looks out of the car window he perceives a scene which appears to be a composite of figures merely occupying space, where movement seems like an illusion:

The bridge was open to let a schooner through. She was in tow, the tug nudging along under her quarter, trailing smoke, but the ship herself was like she was moving without visible means. A man naked to the waist was coiling down a line. His body was burned the color of leaf tobacco. Another man in a straw hat without any crown was at the wheel. The ship went through the bridge, moving under bare poles like a ghost in broad day, with three gulls hovering above the stern like toys on invisible wires. (Sound and Fury 69)

Later, Quentin links the figure of the gull dragged through space to his own misfortunes, confusing his father's words as he does throughout his section, with the meaning of his own psychological condition:

Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said. A gull on an invisible wire attached through space dragged. (Sound and Fury 81)

Like Quentin's sections in Absalom, the Quentin section of The Sound and the Fury is dominated by "Father said," as is this excerpt. Although critics

consistently have attempted to explain Quentin's suicide by pointing to the "pessimistic" words of his father's, there is no valid reason for believing that Mr. Compson's words are the cause of his son's problems.¹² As Patrick Samway ("Searching for Jason Compson" 204) has noted, we must remember that the presentation of Mr. Compson which we receive in The Sound and the Fury is rendered through the confused perception of a suicidal Quentin. However, in spite of Quentin's confused mingling of his father's words with his own thoughts of despair, one point becomes obvious. It is not Mr. Compson who has taught Quentin to view time as a loss, or taught him to revere the abstract word or idea above the real. Throughout the Quentin section, Mr. Compson attempts to reason with Quentin by using Bergson's philosophy to convince his son to relinquish his idealistic "hold" on life. It is, in fact, Mr. Compson who attempts to free Quentin from the mental framework which denies the heterogeneous flux of life bringing about change. Rather than perpetuating Quentin's view of time as frozen moments, displaced and lost, he tells Quentin that "clocks slay time [and that] time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life" (Sound and Fury 66). By telling Quentin that clocks slay time, Mr. Compson is trying to make his son realize that his attempts to stop time are contrary to nature. Throughout the Quentin

¹²One of the latest texts dedicated solely to the interpretation of Absalom rests on the supposition that Quentin of Absalom is the same Quentin in the Sound and the Fury whose suicide is the result of his father's nihilistic way of looking at life. See, David Paul Ragan. William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!: A Critical Study. Ann Arbor: UMI P, 1987.

section, Mr. Compson attempts to reason with Quentin by using Bergson's philosophy to convince his son that things change. The fact that Mr. Compson represents Bergson's view that the conception of clock time denies mobility and continuity is reinforced by an earlier statement attributed to Mr. Compson by Quentin. Quentin remembers that "Father said that constant speculation regarding the position of mechanical hands on an arbitrary dial [is] a symptom of mind-function" (Sound and Fury 60). Quentin, however, appears to disregard his father's words because he does not want to hear about change. Yet, in spite of his attempts to repress change, his father's words concerning the source of his problems erupt into Quentin's consciousness. As Quentin boards the streetcar in Cambridge around lunch time, what his father has been trying to tell him about his problem with time breaks into Quentin's fragmented thoughts. His confused thoughts indicate the possibility that there may be a time more real than the position of hands on the face of a clock, or the sounds of moments being ticked off. Quentin even considers the notion that he has confused time and space, but ultimately disregards the fact that his view of time may be his problem. In a passage which especially reflects Quentin's mingling of his father's words with his own fragmented thought sequences Quentin says

I could hear my watch whenever the car stopped, but not often they
were already eating who would play a Eating the business of
eating inside of you space too space and time confused Stomach

saying noon brain saying eat o'clock All right I wonder what time
it is what of it. (Sound and Fury 81)

Quentin's use of the phrase here of "time and space confused" apparently reflects his father's Bergsonian notions, yet he is incapable of understanding what his father is trying to tell him about time's continuous change. Quentin, however, can not free his mind from the conceptual restraints which stop time, regardless of his father's effort to "promote a certain effort towards the intuition of the constitutive duration of his [Quentin's] own being" (Bergson, Metaphysics 27). Quentin, it seems, cannot integrate time because he cannot integrate his own being; his sense of a divided and lost self overshadows every experience, including that of his father's attempts to talk Quentin out of a mind set which would lead to his defeat. Many of the words and phrases which Quentin remembers in The Sound and the Fury, and which critics have called Mr. Compson's "pessimism," are words which Quentin has taken out of context and inserted into his own framework of loss and despair. For example, the opening paragraph of the Quentin section gives the initial impression that Mr. Compson has planted the notion of the individual's defeat by time into Quentin's mind. As Quentin listens to his watch tick off moments, he thinks,

It was Grandfather's [watch] and when Father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; its rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum [reductio ad 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. (Sound and Fury 59)

If we place these words of Mr. Compson within the context of the entire Quentin section, perhaps we can see that they were meant to combat Quentin's own threatening, idealistic approach to life rather than enforce it. His father's words "reducto absurdum [reductio ad absurdum] of all human experience" break into Quentin's consciousness several times in his section, making it apparent that reducing experiences to an absurdity, or encapsulating all life into a single idea, is the source of Quentin's problems. Further, Mr. Compson's comment concerning the folly of assuming a once and for all victory is particularly relevant to Quentin. It will be remembered that one of the experiences which is particularly threatening to Quentin's ego is his failure to win the fight with Caddy's lover, Dalton Ames. Rather than even striking a blow to Dalton Ames, Quentin faints after he has challenged Ames to a fight. After this episode Quentin begins to wonder if he is more woman than man, indicating a loss of his ability to intuit an essential self. Mr. Compson's words that "victories are only illusions" are meant to combat Quentin's preoccupation with his defeat by Dalton Ames. What Mr.

Compson is trying to tell his son is that what he feels so strongly about now will not continue to affect him so in the course of time. Further, even if Quentin had won the battle with Dalton Ames, he would not have established a permanent solution for his problems with change. However, regardless of his father's attempts to talk Quentin out of relinquishing his too serious "hold" on life, the idea in which he neatly categorizes all experiences, Quentin becomes more and more preoccupied with the notion that he must not be a man if he can not prevent his sister's loss of virginity. It appears that he is really more bothered by the fact that it is Caddy, a female, who is "unvirgin," rather than himself, a male, who in the South, as Quentin thinks, is not expected to be a virgin. Recognizing that his son is overly preoccupied with the idea of virginity, Mr. Compson explains the source of Quentin's problem to him. He says, "it's because you are a virgin: don't you see? Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It's nature hurting you, not Caddy" (Sound and Fury 90). However, Quentin refuses to accept his father's insight into his problem and projects his own tendency to substitute the word or idea for reality onto his father by accusing his father of doing nothing but using "words." Adamantly refusing to allow his son to escape the issue so easily, Mr. Compson says, "so is virginity [just a word or idea not real]."

Mr. Compson obviously has the correct insight into the nature of his son's problems; it is the idea which Quentin immerses himself into, not the flow of time or reality. The fact that Quentin holds the "idea of the thing" supreme to

the real experience becomes obvious in his confrontation with Ames where he addresses Dalton with the words "I'll give you until sundown to leave town" (Sound and Fury 124). By using this phrase lifted from a piece of childish romantic fiction, Quentin has placed himself in the role of the hero who is protecting what is right, the purity of his sister. Throughout his section, we see Quentin playing the role of a "champion of women," or more accurately, the champion of the idea of a woman which, as his father attempts to explain, no woman believes. Taking the idea of a hero to extremes, Quentin converts his feelings of inadequacy for being a virgin into the idea of a martyred saint, confusing his own identity with "Good Saint Francis" and Jesus. He refuses to relinquish the importance he has attached to being a virgin because remaining a virgin is a way for him to deny that states in nature do change. Failing to accept the fact that Caddy's situation has changed, that she is no longer "the virgin" but an unmarried pregnant woman, Quentin attempts to interfere with her plans to marry the vacuous, but available, Herbert Head.

Quentin's attempts to stop the change in Caddy are carried out through words which in themselves are solidified ideas abstracted from the flow of reality. He resorts to words hyperbolic in nature, and as Bergson says of all words, "not quite fitting the thing exactly" (Metaphysics 29). He confronts Herbert with the fact that he knows Herbert was expelled from Harvard for cheating, hoping that his verbal confrontation with Herbert will prevent Caddy's marriage by driving Herbert from the Compson household in disgrace. Several times the words that

he has used to stop Caddy from marrying Herbert, "Not that blackguard, Caddy!," break into Quentin's thoughts.¹³ By labeling Herbert with the somewhat archaic term "blackguard," rather than calling him the simple-minded fool and cheat which Herbert appears to be, Quentin has escalated his battle with Herbert into a fight with a Machiavellian villain. As Quentin's ideas begin to usurp the place of reality more and more, the words "Quentin has shot Herbert; he shot his voice through the floor of Caddy's room" (Sound and Fury 186-87) repeatedly break into Quentin's thoughts. At first Quentin appears to have transformed his words with Herbert into a victory, but the repetition of the phrase, "Quentin shot Herbert down with words," only returns to assault him with feelings of inadequacy, for to shoot down with words is not the same as to shoot down with a gun. Ultimately, Quentin recognizes that his words to Herbert are only another pathetic attempt to stop the change in Caddy as he repeatedly envisions Caddy picking up the train of her wedding gown and "running" out of his life. With Caddy's leaving, the abstracted idea, or the "solid hold" which Quentin had placed on life, vanishes. With the loss of the idea, Quentin thinks, "all things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who" (Sound and Fury 133). Yet even as Quentin

¹³Perhaps Quentin in Absalom has converted the term "blackguard" into a concrete image in the form of the black Charles Bon who threatens the sister's virginity.

contemplates suicide, he replaces the actual fact of his death with words. He claims that what he wants to escape are the "loud voices," so he merely replaces the actual passage of his life into death with the thought of the "most peaceful words." He thinks, "A quarter hour yet. And then I'll not be. The peaceablest words. Peaceablest words. Non Fui. Sum. Fui. Nom sum" (Sound and Fury 136).

Here Quentin merely has substituted one word for another, a peaceful word for a loud word, in his attempt to use language to resolve his anxiety concerning change. His use of words, although pathological, supports Bergson's insistence that all words merely disguise the changing impressions of the real world. In Time and Free Will Bergson declares,

In short, the word with well-defined outlines, the rough and ready word, which stores up the stable, common, and consequently impersonal element in the impressions of mankind, overwhelms or at least covers over the delicate and fugitive impressions of our individual consciousness. (132)

Bergson's point here is that if we recognize the function of words, we will not become trapped in them by losing sight of the reality which the words pretend to present. This notion concerning the "fix" on the real by the word appears to underlie Mr. Compson's arguments attempting to sway Quentin from his hold in the idea. Ironically, Mr. Compson believes that his son is too attached to "ideas" to kill himself, evidenced by Quentin's attempt to cover up the real change in Caddy by lying to his father that he, Quentin, had committed incest with his

sister. Mr. Compson sees that Quentin is so obsessed with the idea of his sister's unchanging purity that he is willing to invent a "sin" to cover up the fact that Caddy has been "deflowered" by other men, and, consequently, while still possessed by a sense of value in the idea, will take no action, as suicide, which would make the idea meaningless. Mr. Compson believes that no man will take his life until he comes to think that nothing is worthwhile, and since Quentin apparently still thinks his sister's virginity is important enough to maintain through sin, he tells his son, "no you will not do that until you come to believe that even she was not quite worth despair" (Sound and Fury 139). However, Mr. Compson fails to realize that Quentin might substitute the loss of one idea with another idea, or the loss of one word, "virginity," with another, "suicide," so that he can ensure the quality of a state which can not change. Ironically, Quentin becomes a victim of his own words, not his father's.

Out of all of Faulkner's characters, the one who appears to express Bergson's concept of words most fully is Addie Bundren. Addie claims that she "learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (As I Lay Dying 115). When she had her first child, Cash, Addie says she came to realize that words were invented by people who did not know what they were talking about, people who merely used words as "a shape to fill a lack" (Dying 116). After her first experience with childbearing, Addie claims that she knew "motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for

it or not" (Lay Dying 115). After she found out that motherhood was just a word, Addie says that she knew "fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who never had pride" (Lay Dying 115). Refuting the Platonic notion that words, or ideas are the real relations between "things," Addie declares that words separate people, make people "use one another by words" until all become "like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging, and twisting and never touching" (115-16). Addie also notes that her husband, Anse, "had a word, too. Love he called it" (116), and realizes that once Anse had formulated the word to her, she had been tricked. Like Bergson, Addie grasps the fact that, "words, as soon as they [are] formed, [will] turn against the sensation which gave birth to them, and invented to show that the sensation is unstable, they would impose on it their own stability" (Time and Free Will 132).

Bergson explains in Time and Free Will that love is a sensation unique to every individual, but once the sensation is turned into a word it loses its freshness and uniqueness through the common and repeatable expression, "love." Like Bergson, Addie too realizes that once Anse has pronounced the word "love" to her, he no longer feels what he is pretending to assert. Addie recognizes that like his use of the word "love" to her, Anse uses words to use people. He repeats the same trite expressions to get people to do his work for him or take care of him. Most importantly, however, Addie senses that Anse, like all others, has failed truly to acknowledge her behind his veil of words. She then decides that her "revenge" will take the form of words in which "Anse would never know

she was taking revenge" because "Anse had been tricked by words too" (Lay Dying 116). It is in the promise to have her buried next to her father in the town of Jefferson, words extracted from Anse, that Addie receives her "silent" revenge. Although dead, her family cannot avoid the concrete awareness of Addie as they bear the weight of her coffin or even bear the stench of her decaying body, too long unburied because of the arduous journey to Jefferson. The fact that the reality of Addie can no longer be covered up by words is reflected in the comment by a black man to his companion as the Bundren wagon passes them on the road: "Great God, what they got in that wagon?" Although Jewel wants to fight over those words, assuming that the comment had come from a nearby white man, the reality of the horrible stench from Addie's decaying body can not be covered up with more words.

It becomes apparent that Bergson's mistrust of words and his warning of the conceptual threat to reality is rendered in As I Lay Dying, but with a particularly ironic thrust. So too has Bergson's warning concerning the failure of the intellect to grasp what is real been rendered in Faulkner's portrayal of his failed characters in Absalom, Light in August and The Sound and the Fury. However, the question remains, are there any examples in Faulkner's works which demonstrate a successful grasp of the real through intuition? Without a doubt, the young boy's, Ike's, sighting of the bear in Go Down Moses is Faulkner's best account of grasping the uniqueness of the "thing" free from the

constraints of old ideas. In order to "see" the bear, the young boy goes into the woods, leaving his gun behind:

He had left the gun; by his own will and relinquishment he had accepted not a gambit, not a choice, but a condition in which not only the bear's heretofore inviolable anonymity but all the ancient rules and balances of hunter and hunted had been abrogated.

("The Bear." Go Down Moses 207)

Yet Ike's casting off of the gun, the symbol of the hunter, is not enough to enable him to find the bear; he finds he must relinquish the signs and symbols of man's major impediments to his immersion in time and reality, his compass and his watch. After casting off these symbolical objects which represent the confusion of time with concepts of math and space, the bear appears to Ike:

Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon's hot dappling, not as big as he had dreamed it but as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him. Then it moved. It crossed the glade without haste, walking for an instant into the sun's full glare and out of it, and stopped again and looked back at him across one shoulder. It faded, sank back into the wilderness without motion as he had watched a fish, a huge old bass, sink back into the dark depths of its pool and vanish without even any movement of its fins. ("The Bear." Go Down Moses 209)

The contradiction of images which Faulkner presents here seems to suggest Bergsonian influences. The bear, described as "not as big" as Ike had dreamed, "but as big as he had expected, bigger," intimates the Bergsonian insistence that the idea of the thing never quite fits the thing exactly. Ike paradoxically explains that his idea of the bear was "bigger" than the bear which was "bigger" than his idea. The confusion in Ike's explanation here suggests Bergson's insistence that intuition can never be given in words which, by their nature, confuse the reality of the experience. In his Introduction to Metaphysics, Bergson insists that the knowledge gained through intuition must necessarily be inexpressible through words; the closest one can come to expressing knowledge gained from intuition is through flowing images, and the more contradictory the images, the closer one comes to rendering the real. The bear, in this passage, does not "appear" or "emerge" for long as a solidified form. Rather, the bear, as Bergson declares of all aspects of reality, is there, its existence not merely to be discovered or hunted down by an intellect which brings the "thing" into presence by abstracting its linear, or solidified form, from the moving reality. Any solidified image of the bear which Ike may momentarily grasp merges back into the dappling obscurity from which the recognition of the bear, or idea of bears, momentarily takes shape. However, intuition has preceded conceptual awareness in Ike's experience of the bear; Ike has been granted an intuitive grasp of the thing, free of the idea of it, "bigger, dimensionless, against the dappled obscurity."

Through the abrogation of "all the ancient rules and balances of hunter and hunter," Ike has broken free from "the natural bent of the intellect" which hunts for the "thing" in experience which will satisfy the idea. Ike has cast off the role of the hunter who follows the metaphysical approach to reality in which, as Bergson explains, "we place ourselves in the immobile in order to lie in wait for the moving thing as it passes, instead of replacing ourselves in the moving thing itself, in order to traverse with it the immobile positions" (Metaphysics 50).

When Ike "relinquishes completely" to the "markless wilderness," or the reality without form, he immerses himself in the flow of the real. His "coincidence" with mobility becomes rendered through "flowing images," which as Bergson argues in his Metaphysics are the closest expressions of the real that we can formulate through words. After throwing away the gun, watch and compass, discarding the approach of the "hunter," Ike sits on a log and allows the bear to "appear" before him. His intuitive grasp of the bear "emerges" through images of flowing water and movement:

[He saw] as he sat down on the log the crooked print [of the bear's paw], the warped indentation in the wet ground which while he looked at it continued to fill with water until it was level full and the water began to overflow and the sides of the print began to dissolve away. Even as he looked up he saw the next one, and moving, the one beyond it; moving, not hurrying, running, but merely keeping pace with them as they appeared before him as

though they were being shaped out of thin air [until they, boy and paw print, emerged suddenly] into a little glade and the wilderness coalesced. . . . then he saw the bear. ("The Bear." Go Down Moses 208-09)

Perhaps what can be inferred from Faulkner's description of Ike's immersion into the real is that whenever Faulkner renders experience through flowing or moving images, he is attempting to render what is real in the Bergsonian sense. For example in Light in August, Hightower's awakening to the reality of his guilt for substituting the image of his galloping grandfather for the real faces of those who surround him in life is signalled by the images of a turning wheel and breaking flood waters. As Hightower's mind begins to spin like a wheel, the faces of all whom he refused to see appear before him in a glowing halo. When he apprehends the faces of individuals, he senses that "some ultimate damned flood within him" (Light in August 466) has broken, making him feel "lighter and lighter, emptying, floating" (Light in August 466). His consciousness of the individual moving faces which emerge from, and return to, the composite halo of faces as the "wheel" in his mind spins faster and faster, suggests Hightower's ultimate grasp of the moving reality.

Faulkner's characters who refuse to accept the mobile nature of reality also appear to refuse movement. For example, Quentin in The Sound and the Fury, unlike Hightower, refuses to "float." Quentin wants to insure permanent rest by tying irons to his feet so that even his drowned body will refuse to rise up

from the bottom of the river. His failure to accept movement is reflected in his paradoxical perception of a gull flying motionless in the air. Countless images of arrested movement, like Quentin's gull, appear throughout Faulkner's works suggesting a faulty, immobile view of the moving reality. Images of dust pervade Faulkner's works, intimating the failure to accept mobility and change. As Absalom begins, Quentin's first impression is of the all-pervasive dust which leaves him feeling weary. Later, as he accompanies Rosa to the old Sutpen mansion, Quentin is intimidated by the dust which he thinks warns him not to intrude. Rosa's refusal of change, like Emily Grierson's, is represented by Faulkner's description of the dust covered objects in her home which have remained unmoved, merely arranged to occupy space and collect dust. Unable to move beyond her experience with Sutpen, Rosa, like her dust covered surroundings, seems to have remained stationary for forty-three years.

What becomes most apparent, however, from this study of Faulkner's works is that any character obsessed with clock time, or the confusion of the real nature of time with notions of math and space, is doomed to a sense of repetition which leads to his defeat. His memories become mere impressions which continually assault him by breaking into his consciousness unsummoned rather than becoming the source of what Bergson has called a "pure recollection" which informs him that life, as well as his own being, is a continual integration of successions which endure through time by "changing without ceasing."

Bibliography

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Richard P. "Faulkner and the Myth of the South." Mississippi Quarterly 14 (1961): 131-37.
- . Faulkner: Myth and Motion. Princeton UP, 1968.
- Arieti, Silvano. On Schizophrenia, Phobias, Depressions: Selected Papers. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1978.
- Aristotle. "Time." The Philosophy of Time. Ed. Richard M. Gale. Garden City: Doubleday, 1967. 9-23.
- Augustine. "Some Questions About Time." Philosophy of Time. Ed. Richard Gale. Garden City: Doubleday, 1967. 38-54.
- Austin, J. L. How To Do Things With Words. Ed. J. O. Urmson and Maria Sbisa. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962.
- Barth, J. Robert, ed. Religious Perspectives in Faulkner's Fiction. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1972.
- Behrens, Ralph. "Collapse of Dynasty: The Thematic Center of *Absalom, Absalom!*" PMLA 89.1 (1974): 24-33.
- Beja, Morris. "A Flash, A Glare: Faulkner and Time." Renascence 16 (1964): 133-41, 145.
- Benjamin, John. "A Method for Distinguishing and Evaluating Formal Thinking Disorders in Schizophrenia." Language and Thought in Schizophrenia. Ed. J. S. Kasanin. Berkeley: U of California P, 1944. 65-89.

- Bergson, Henri. Creative Evolution. Trans. Arthur Mitchell. New York: Henry Holt, 1928.
- . The Creative Mind. Trans. Mabelle L. Andison. New York: The Philosophical Library, 1947.
- . "Form and Becoming." The Philosophy of Time. Ed. Richard Gale. Garden City: Doubleday, 1967. 397-405.
- . An Introduction to Metaphysics. Trans. T. E. Hulme. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1949.
- . Matter and Memory. Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1929.
- . Time and Free Will. Trans. F. L. Pogson. New York: Harper and Row, 1960.
- Bjork, Lehnart. "Ancient Myths and the Moral Framework of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" American Literature 35 (1963): 196-201.
- Blake, Nancy. "Creation and Procreation: The Voice and the Name or Biblical Intertextuality in *Absalom, Absalom!*" Intertextuality in Faulkner. Eds. Michel Gresset and Noel Polk. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1985. 128-43.
- Bleikasten, André. "Fathers in Faulkner." The Fictional Father: Lacanian Readings of the Text. Ed. Robert Con Davis. Amherst: Massachusetts UP, 1981. 115-46.
- Blotner, Joseph L., and Frederick L. Gwynn, eds. Faulkner in the University. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1959.

Bouvard, Loïc. "Conversation With William Faulkner." Trans. Dan Piper.

Modern Fiction Studies 5 (1959-60): 361-64.

Brooks, Cleanth. "History and the Sense of the Tragic: *Absalom, Absalom!*" Ed.

Robert Penn Warren. *Twentieth Century Views*. Englewood Cliffs:

Pentice Hall, 1964. 186-203.

---. Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond. New Haven: Yale UP, 1978.

---. William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County. New Haven: Yale UP,
1963.

Broughton, Panthea Reid. William Faulkner: the Abstract and the Actual.

Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1974.

Brylowski, Walter. Faulkner's Olympian Laugh. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1968.

Buselmeyer, J. E. "Faulkner's Narrative Styles." American Literature 53 (1981):
424-42.

Campbell, Harry, and Ruel E. Foster. William Faulkner: A Critical Appraisal.

New York: Cooper Square, 1970.

Carr, H. Wildon. Henri Bergson: The Philosophy of Change. New York:

Kennikat, 1970.

Cassirer, Ernst. The Logic of the Humanities. Trans. Clarence Smith Howe.

New Haven: Yale UP, 1960.

---. The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol. 2. Trans. Ralph Manheim. New
Haven: Yale UP, 1955.

- Cleugh, M. F. Time and Its Importance in Modern Thought. New York: Russell and Russell, 1970.
- Coanda, Richard. "*Absalom, Absalom!* The Edge of Infinity." Renascence 2 (1958): 3-5.
- Coindreau, Maurice Edgar. The Time of William Faulkner. Ed. and trans. George McMillan Reeves. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1971.
- Connolly, Thomas. "Point of View in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" Fiction Studies 27 (1981): 255-72.
- Davis, Robert Con. "The Discourse of the Father." The Fictional Father: Lacanian Readings of the Text. Ed. Robert Con Davis. Amherst: Massachusetts UP, 1981. 115-46.
- Faulkner, William. Absalom, Absalom! The Modern Library. New York: Random House, 1936.
- . As I Lay Dying. New York: Random House, 1930.
- . Go Down Moses. The Modern Library. New York: Random House, 1940.
- . Light in August. Vintage Books. New York: Random House, 1972.
- . "A Rose for Emily." Collected Stories of William Faulkner. Vintage Books. New York: Random House, 1977. 119-130.
- . The Sound and the Fury. New York: Random House, 1929.
- Findlay, J. N. "Time: A Treatment of Some Puzzles." Philosophy of Time. Ed. Richard Gale. Garden City: Doubleday, 1967. 397-405.

- Fisch, Harold. A Remembered Future: A Study in Literary Mythology.
Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.
- Forrester, John. Language and the Origin of Psychoanalysis. New York:
Columbia UP, 1980.
- Freud, Sigmund. The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vols.
12 and 18. The Standard Edition. Ed. and trans. James Strachey.
London: Hogarth Press, 1955.
- . General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology. Ed. Philip Rieff.
New York: Collier, 1963.
- Gale, Richard M., ed. The Philosophy of Time. Garden City: Doubleday, 1967.
- Gold, Joseph. William Faulkner: A Study in Humanism from Metaphor to
Discourse. Norman, Oklahoma: U of Oklahoma P, 1966.
- Guttenberg, Barnett, ed. Faulkner Studies. Coral Gables: U of Miami P, 1980.
- Guetti, James. The Limits of Metaphor. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1967.
- Hagan, John. "Deja Vu and the Effect of Timelessness in Faulkner's *Absalom,
Absalom!*" The Bucknell Review 2 (1963): 31-52.
- Hoffman, Frederick J. William Faulkner. New York: Twayne, 1961.
- Holman, Hugh C. "Absalom, Absalom!: The Edge of Infinity." Renascence 2
(1958): 3-5.
- Hunt, John W. William Faulkner: Art in Theological Tension. Syracuse:
Syracuse UP, 1965.

- Irwin, John T. "The Dead Father in Faulkner." The Fictional Father: Lacanian Readings of the Text. Ed. Robert Con Davis. Amherst: Massachusetts UP, 1981. 147-68.
- . Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1975.
- Kartiganer, Donald. "Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*: The Discovery of Values." American Literature 37 (1965): 291-306.
- . "Faulkner's Art of Repetition." Faulkner and the Craft of Fiction. Eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1989. 21-47.
- . The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1979.
- . "The Role of Myth in *Absalom, Absalom!*." Modern Fiction Studies 9.4 (1964): 357-69.
- Kerr, Elizabeth. Yoknapatawpha. New York: Fordham UP, 1969.
- Kolakowski, Leszek. Bergson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Kuyk, Dirk. Sutpen's Design: Interpreting Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990.
- Lacan, Jacques. The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis. Trans. and intro. Anthony Wilder. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1968.

- . Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis. Trans. and notes Anthony Wilder. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1981.
- Langford, Gerald. Faulkner's Revision of *Absalom, Absalom!* Austin: U of Texas P, 1971.
- Lind, Ilse Dusoier. "The Design and Meaning of *Absalom, Absalom!*" PMLA 70.2 (1955): 887-912.
- Lindsay, A. D. The Philosophy of Bergson. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1968.
- Longley, John Lewis, Jr. The Tragic Mask. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1963.
- MacCabe, Colin, ed. The Talking Cure: Essays in Psychoanalysis and Language. New York: St. Martins, 1981.
- Maher, Brendan. Principles of Psychopathology. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.
- Matthews, John T. The Play of Faulkner's Language. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.
- Meriwether, James B., and Michael Millgate, eds. Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner. New York: Random House, 1968.
- Miller, J. Hillis. Fiction and Repetition. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.
- Moreland, Richard C. "Compulsion and Revisionary Repetition." Faulkner and the Craft of Fiction. Eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1989. 48-68.
- . Faulkner and Modernism. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990.

- Morris, Wesley. Reading Faulkner. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989.
- Mortimer, Gail L. Faulkner's Rhetoric of Loss. Austin: U of Texas P, 1983.
- Muhlenfeld, Elisabeth. William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*: A Critical Casebook. New York: Garland, 1984.
- O'Donnell, George Marion. "Faulkner's Mythology." William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism. Ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga Vickery. East Lansing: Michigan State College UP, 1951. 49-62.
- Page, Sally R. Faulkner's Women: Characterization and Meaning. Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards, 1973.
- Part, Susan R. "The Fourteenth Image of the Blackbird: Another Look at Truth in *Absalom, Absalom!*" Arizona Quarterly 35 (1979): 153-64.
- Plotinus. "Time and Eternity." Philosophy of Time. Ed. Richard Gale. Garden City: Doubleday, 1967. 24-37.
- Porrier, William. "Strange Gods in Jefferson, Mississippi: Analysis of *Absalom, Absalom!*" William Faulkner: Two Decades of Criticism. Ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery. East Lansing: Michigan State College P, 1951. 217-43.
- Pouillon, Jean. "Time and Destiny in Faulkner." Trans. Jacqueline Merriam. Faulkner. Ed. Robert Penn Warren. Twentieth Century Views. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966.
- Ragan, David Paul. William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*: A Critical Study. Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1987.

- Reed, Joseph W. Faulkner's Narrative. New Haven: Yale UP, 1973.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shalomith. "From Reproduction to Production: The Status of Narration in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" Degres 16 (1978): 1-19.
- Rollyson, Carl E. "The Re-Creation of the Past in *Absalom, Absalom!*" Mississippi Quarterly 29 (1976): 361-74.
- Ross, Stephen M. "Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and the David Story." The David Myth in Western Literature. Eds. Raymond Jan Frontain and Jan Wojcik. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1980. 136-53.
- Samway, Patrick. "Searching for Jason Richmond Compson." Intertextuality in Faulkner. Eds. Michael Gressett and Noel Polk. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1985. 178-209.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Time in the Work of Faulkner." Literary and Philosophical Essays. Trans. Annette Michelson. London: Rider, 1955. 79-87.
- Schneiderman, Stuart. Ed. and trans. Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980.
- Schoenberg, Ellen. Old Tales and Talking: Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Related Works. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1977.
- Searle, John R. Speech Acts. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969.
- Slatoff, Walter J. Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner. Westport: Greenwood P, 1960.

- Smith, Joseph, ed. Psychiatry and the Humanities. Vol. 3. New Haven: Yale UP, 1978.
- Snead, James A. Figures of Division. New York: Methuen, 1986.
- Spence, Donald P. "Lexical Leakage." Applied Psycholinguistics and Mental Health. Ed. R. W. Rieker. New York: Plenum, 1980. 139-75.
- Sullivan, Walter. "Tragic Design of *Absalom, Absalom!*" South Atlantic Quarterly 50 (1951): 552-66.
- Swiggart, Peter. The Art of Faulkner's Novels. Austin: U of Texas P, 1962.
- Tate, Allen. "William Faulkner: 1897-1962." The Sewanee Review 71 (1963): 160-4.
- Tobin, Patricia. "The Time of Myth and History in *Absalom, Absalom!*" American Literature 45 (1973): 252-70.
- Vetter, Harold, ed. Language Behavior and Psychopathology. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969.
- Von Domarus, E. "The Specific Laws of Logic in Schizophrenia." Language and Thought in Schizophrenia. Ed. J. S. Kassin. Berkeley: U of California P, 1944. 65-89.
- Wadlington, Warwick. Reading Faulknerian Tragedy. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987.
- Warren, Robert Penn. "Faulkner: Past and Future." Faulkner. Ed. Robert Penn Warren. Twentieth Century Views. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966. 1-22.

Weinstein, Philip. "Thinking I Was I Was Not Who Was Not Was Not Who':

The Vertigo of Faulknerian Identity." Faulkner and the Craft of Fiction.

Eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi,

1989. 172-93.

Wyatt, David. Prodigal Sons: A Study in Authorship and Authority. Baltimore:

The Johns Hopkins UP, 1980.

Young, Thomas Daniel. "Narration As Creative Act." Faulkner, Modernism and

Film. Ed. Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of

Mississippi, 1979. 81-102.

Zoellner, Robert H. "Faulkner's Prose Style in *Absalom, Absalom!*" American

Literature 30 (1959): 486-502.

VITA

Sonja Russell Haney was born in Charlottesville, Virginia on February 9, 1949. She attended local schools in Charlottesville and graduated from Lane High School in June, 1966. The following fall she entered Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, Georgia and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy in 1970. She also attended the University of Virginia where she took additional courses in Philosophy and English. In 1975 she entered East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina where she received a Master of Arts degree in English in 1977. While in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, she also took additional courses in English, Philosophy and Psychology at the University of North Carolina. In August, 1992 she received the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English at The University of Tennessee in Knoxville.