

T.C
İstanbul Üniversitesi
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü
Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Anabilim Dalı
Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Bilim Dalı

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

“The Tragedy of the South and
William Faulkner’s Stylistic Ingenuity:
The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!”

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Öz

Eski Güney'in aristokratik geleneği temel olarak puritan doğruluğu ve ahlaksal bütünlük üzerine kurulmuştu. Sarsılmaz etik değerleri nedeniyle Güney halkı kendisini dış dünyadan soyutlayarak zaman içinde geçmişe dönük yaşayan bir toplum haline geldi. Dolayısıyla, aristokrat sınıfı ahlaksal bir dejenerasyon sürecine girdi. Tutuculuğunun yanısıra, Güney'in ekonomik temelini oluşturan kölelik sistemiyle ilgili sorunları da vardı. Beyazların kölelere olan sömürsü, kötü muameleleri, ve cinsel istismarı Eski Güney'in giderek kötü bir şöhret kazanmasına neden oldu. Bununla birlikte, kuzeyin endüstrideki gelişimi sebebiyle iki kesim arasında bölgesel bir anlaşmazlık meydana geldi. Bu durumun sonucunda Güney'in yenilmesi ve kölelik sisteminin son bulmasıyla sonuçlanan Amerikan İç Savaşı (1862-1865) patlak verdi. Güney bölgesi, ekonomik ve ahlaksal çöküşünden asla kurtulamadı. Önceleri bölgenin ileri gelenlerinden olan aristokratlar içe dönük ve kaderci insanlar haline geldiler. Asil kökenli bir aile içinde doğan William Faulkner'in romanlarının odak noktası Güney aristokrasisinin trajik çöküşüdür. Çalışmada Faulkner'in başlıca iki romanı olan The Sound and the Fury ve Absalom, Absalom!'da Güneylilerin ahlaksal bütünlüğünün dağılmasının tasvirinde yoğun olarak kullandığı biçimsel teknikler irdelenmiştir. İlk evrede her iki romandaki ahlaksal çöküş teması incelenmiştir. İkinci evrede her iki romanın anlatısı bireyin toplumdaki yerinden oluşunu Faulkner'in bilinç akımı, iç monolog, fragmentasyon ve yineleme gibi modernist edebi teknikler vasıtasıyla tasviri bakımından irdelenmiştir

Abstract

The aristocratic tradition of the Old South was basically founded upon puritan uprightness and moral integrity. Because of its unshakeable ethical values, the Southern community isolated itself from the outer world, and gradually became a backward-looking society. Consequently, the aristocrats moved towards a process of moral degeneration. Apart from its conservatism, the South was also troubled with the system of slavery, which was its financial basis. The white man's exploitation, maltreatment and sexual abuse of slaves resulted in the gradual disrepute of the Old South. Moreover, as a result of the North's progress in industry, a sectional conflict occurred between the two regions. The result was the outbreak of the American Civil War (1862-1865), which ended with the defeat of the South and the cessation of the system of slavery. The South was never able to recover its economic and moral dissolution. The previously prominent aristocrats succumbed to self-absorption and fatalism. William Faulkner, who was born to a family with noble origins, focused on the tragic collapse of the Southern aristocracy in his novels. The present study explores Faulkner's extensive use of stylistic devices in the depiction of the decomposition of the Southerners' moral center in two of his prominent novels, The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! In the first phase, the theme of ethical decline in both of the novels has been analyzed. In the second phase, the narratives of the two works have been examined in terms of Faulkner's portrayal of the displacement of the self through the modernist literary techniques of stream of consciousness, interior monologue, fragmentation, and repetition.

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Introduction

William Faulkner is one of the prominent writers of the modern American novel whose focus of attention was the military and cultural defeat of the South in the Civil War¹. The reason for this is his deep sense of attachment to his hometown, Mississippi, which is an outcome of the social and cultural standards that he internalized as the son of a noble family. Consequently, many of his novels can be regarded as explorations of the moral decline of the South after the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction.

The South in which Faulkner had grown up was conservative and puritanical. It had its specific and unshakeable moral conducts that aroused a sense of immobility. Apart from its established social order, the South had acquired its financial power through the system of slavery. Before the breakout of the Civil War, the region was in a process of expansion. The cotton plantations served perfectly as the most profitable means for the welfare of the landowners. However, they were so deeply involved with the prosperity of their plantations that they began to fall into disrepute because of their maltreatment of the slaves. The torture and sexual abuse that the slaves were exposed to were hidden behind the splendor of the manor houses. David Minter describes the dishonorable background of the South as follows:

Beneath the nation's official history lay thousands of brutal stories – of people captured and enslaved; of people robbed of their land and herded onto reservations; of pioneers whose backbreaking labors had done little more than scar the plains; of women ignored, belittled, dominated, and abused; of working masses huddled in ghettos; of gaunt tenant farmers and itinerant day laborers. (Minter, 1996: 204, 205)

The starting point of the problematic situation of the Old South was the system of slavery. The different economic policies of the North and the South resulted in their historical sectional conflict. Under the influence of industrialism, the North demanded the cessation of the system of slavery. The slave states of the South

¹ The American Civil War (1861-1865) was fought between the United States of America (the Union) and the states which announced their separation from the Union (the Confederate States). The reasons of the war varied from slavery to states rights. The result, succeeded by the period of Reconstruction, was the victory of the Union

were defeated by the abolitionist Northern states after four years of bloody battles. The South could never get over the financial and ethical destruction that was caused by the war. In a broader perspective, the South was defeated by the “morally destructive force of materialism.” (Miner, 1952: 135) After the abolition of slavery, the hierarchies within the Southern aristocracy were exposed to radical alterations, and the effects of modernization were in a severe clash with the legacies of the Southern aristocracy that were once favored. In this regard, the conflict of the traditional and anti-traditional world became the basic theme of Faulkner’s novels. According to Cleanth Brooks, this makes Faulkner’s works acquire a sense of universality. This is evident in his following statements:

Faulkner profited enormously from using his local material. It provided him with an excellent means for presenting the characteristic problems of modern man living in a world of drastic change; yet at the same time it gave him an opportunity to insist upon what he regarded as the eternal truths about the age-old and essentially unchanging human predicament. Employing his native materials, he found that he could stay home and yet touch upon universal issues. (Rubin, 1985: 341, 342)

Another one of the ‘native materials’ that Faulkner made use of was the inhuman treatment of the slaves, which became an emotional conflict that the Southerners (in particular, Faulkner) could never overcome in their conscience.

The stated series of disappointing events caused the Southern aristocrats to remain passive because of their incapability of resolving the challenging conflicts that their hometown had to go through. Their detachment, coldness, and psychological impotence played a crucial role in the formation of the thematic and stylistic attributes of Faulkner’s novels. *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are two of his major novels that portray his sense of despair and sensitivity about the collapse of the old order in the South. Both of the novels “...represent something strange and lost – something that the modern world is deeply ambivalent about and therefore cannot quite ignore, no matter how much it would like to ignore it.” (Minter, 1994: 243, 244) In this regard, Faulkner’s admiration of the old order and his commitment to the moral values of the Southern aristocracy can be regarded as clarifying his insistent emphasis on the notion of the past. In Faulkner’s view, “The past was alive in the present. Indeed, the present had to be understood as an

extension of the past.” (Rubin, 1985: 340) *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are directly related with two of Faulkner’s principal concerns: the destructiveness of the past; and the attempt of capturing the fluidity of time despite its progression.

The subject matter of both of the novels demanded a complex technique in order for Faulkner to make an extensive depiction of the tragedy and moral degradation of the South. Malcolm Bradbury’s following statements illuminate the background of the stylistic devices that Faulkner adopted:

... [Faulkner] saw the need for redemptive style, in the new decadent fashion. So, as he moved towards fiction, notions of the failure of history, the decline of the west, the degenerations of modernity, the narcissism of the modern existence, the displacement of sexuality, the need to refine sensations and the claims of bohemia were all part of his push towards a modern definition of art and the discovery of a modern style. (Bradbury, 1992: 112, 113)

In the light of the above quotation, it can be argued that Faulkner’s stylistic preferences were a natural consequence of the historical context of his time. The radical developments in all the fields of science and culture at the beginning of the twentieth century resulted in the psychological displacement of the self. Apart from the depression caused by the modern experience, Faulkner’s historical background rendered his view of his hometown profoundly complicated. In other words, “... Faulkner’s vision of the South is not merely complex: at times it is incoherent, and turns back upon itself.” (Cunliffe, 1970: 297) In this regard, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* can be analyzed because of their quality of depicting the ambivalent state of mind of the Southerners through the coalescence of style and content.

The Sound and the Fury consists of “Quentin’s attempt to arrest both historical and subjective time and maintain [his sister] Candace’s virginity from psychic corruption and time’s flow...” (Bradbury, 1992: 117) In a broader viewpoint, the moral corruption of the South is depicted through the disgrace of Caddy, and the exhaustion of the aristocratic tradition is pictured in Quentin’s futile effort of

fulfilling the *noblesse oblige*². The novel also offers multiple perspectives in the representation of the devastated South: a thirty-three-year-old idiot, a psychologically impotent and obsessive young man, an ultimately degenerate and foul mouthed materialist, and the authorial voice that sums up the previous points of view. The notability of the novel arises from the stylistic devices that Faulkner employs in the rendition of the ethical degeneration of the Old South. His juxtaposition of the scenes that connote degradation, and his intertwinement of the past and the present through the disruption of chronology render *The Sound and the Fury* one of the stimulating examples of the experimental American novel.

The salient feature of *Absalom, Absalom!* is its quality of representing a comprehensive history of the South. “It is the massive, historical, gothic story of Thomas Sutpen’s ‘design’, of cursed land, old tragedies and crimes, of the interlocking of history and psychic disorientation and perversion.” (Bradbury, 1992: 118) Once again, the theme of degeneration comes forth as Faulkner’s major concern. Thomas Sutpen can basically be regarded as the embodiment of the South in that he displays both the pride and shame of the region. Apart from the bravery he displays in the Civil War, he is a man of sheer brutality and vulgarity. The style that Faulkner adopted in this novel enabled him to make a simultaneous portrayal of such contradictory characteristics of his hometown. His employment of multiple perspectives that present completely different views is the basic means through which he designates the unfavorable aspects of the history of his ancestors. Additionally, the theme of repetition plays two crucial roles in Faulkner’s stylistic project in *Absalom, Absalom!* Firstly, by repeating the same story over and over again through different points of view, he enables the reader to empathize with the emotional and psychological conflicts that the major characters experience. In this context, Faulkner’s masterful use of the first person narration attracts attention. Secondly, the continuous repetitions and digressions serve for his intention of distracting the readers’ attention; thus, hiding the dishonorable aspects of the Southern history. Essentially, Faulkner absorbs the issues of slavery, incest,

²The French term *noblesse oblige* means ‘noble obligation.’ It is generally used to describe the social responsibilities of the members of the Southern aristocracy. In Quentin’s view, every member of his family has to act in the parameters of his/her ‘noble’ obligations

miscegenation, and fratricide into the narrative of the novel. While he makes countless repetitions of the subjects that can be regarded as inessential, he makes a vague presentation of the issues that are generally accepted as the disrepute of the Old South.

The intensity of Faulkner's style is apparently a consequence of the terrible events that the South had to undergo. Starting with the hard experiences of the first settlers in the region, almost every historical event that takes place in the Southern history is related with the feeling of anguish. The following quotation makes an overall depiction of the qualifications of the two novels; and in a broader perspective, it represents Faulkner's primary concerns:

These [*The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*] are the books written at the top of his [Faulkner's] talent, and in them we can feel his experimental powers at full force. Each reaches, in small selective units, into the [Southern] experience, revealing it not so much in expository historical narrative as in distinct units of perception. So we feel the long underlying history – from the seventeenth-century moment of settlement in the not quite virgin, Indian South to the immediate present – as a process in which there are occasions of concentration, moments of temporal arrest, millennial instants where history intersects with deep points of psychic crisis or personal perception. Rape and corruption, miscegenation and human taint enact their historical cycles, making Faulkner frequently a novelist of gothic extremity and violence. The various fates of Southern aristocrats and poor whites, blacks and Indians, work themselves out in an apocalyptic landscape. It is a world where in 1833 the 'stars fell' with the appearance of a comet, where in 1865 a whole nation and tradition went down to defeat, and where land as spirit has yielded to land as pure property, woods to axes, gardens to machines, South to North... (Ruland, Bradbury: 1991: 260, 261)

Indeed, the recurrent characters in both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* reflect the psychological displacement of the Southerners who have been a part of the tragic history of the Old South. Correspondingly, Faulkner's challenging style in both of the novels creates an exceedingly deep impact that renders the tragedy of the South an everlasting experience.

1. The Southern Myth: The Moral Decline Depicted in

The Sound and the Fury

It is clear that William Faulkner's depiction of the deterioration of the Southern aristocracy as a myth is a consequence of his indisputable loyalty to the once grand tradition into which he was born. As the son of a family who considered themselves aristocrats, Faulkner was raised in an environment in which manners and social status were extremely important. He was deeply influenced by the somewhat proud and mannered attitudes of his family. Along with his aristocratic origins, the fact that his ancestors were notable figures in the history of his hometown, Mississippi, enabled Faulkner to absorb an unconditional devotion to the morals of Southern aristocracy. Faulkner grew up with stories about his glorious great-grandfather, William Clark Falkner, a colonel who served for the Confederate Army during the Civil War. As well as his military notability, Colonel Falkner, with his several novels and other works, was the founder of literary tradition in the family. Faulkner's following statements clarify the reasons of his admiration of his great grandfather:

My great-grandfather, whose name I bear, was a considerable figure in his time and provincial milieu. He was a prototype of John Sartoris [an important character in *Sartoris* (1929) and *The Unvanquished* (1938)]: commanded the 2nd Mississippi infantry... He built the first railroad in our county, wrote a few books, made grand European tour of his time, died in a duel and the county raised a marble effigy which still stands in Tippah County. (Rubin, 1985: 333)

Faulkner's commitment to the Southern aristocracy had an unquestionable effect on the formation of his sentiments of the ideal South. The fundamental concepts of the tradition such as pride, honor, gallantry, bravery, honesty, grace, sanctification of women, and devotedness to the preservation of the region's integrity were of utmost importance for Faulkner. Consequently, the devastation of such concepts after the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction had a deep impact upon his sense of history. Robert Coughlan's following statements define the decline of Southern aristocracy:

The glorious events of the old days, especially the days during and before the [Civil] war, loomed in the misty distance pure, brave, and out of human

scale; the present, in contrast, was mundane, and its inadequacies- physical and emotional- were laid to the tragedy of the old defeat... the South lapsed into the nurturing of a legend. (Coughlan, 1953: 87)

Confronting the displeasing reality of the present state of the South was dreadfully difficult for Faulkner. This fact can also be considered in terms of the disturbing aspects of the history of Southern aristocracy. Slave abuse and brutality, as well as bigotry and conservatism were the grounds on which the Southern tradition was founded upon. Faulkner was aware of the hard facts about his history; however, he could not disregard his devotion to the Southern tradition. His method of handling this situation enabled him to include everything about the reality of the history of Southern aristocracy. Thus, Faulkner formed a mythical presentation in which he could remain distant to the critique of his own history and tradition. Irving Howe gives a comprehensive description of this situation as such:

...Faulkner in his stories and novels has been conducting a long, sometimes painful and at other times heroic examination of the Southern myth. He has set his pride in the past against his despair over the present, and from this counterpoint has come much of the tension in his work. He has investigated the myth itself; wondered about the relation between the Southern tradition he admires and that memory of Southern slavery to which he is compelled to return; tested not only the present by the past, but also the past by the myth, and finally the myth by that morality which has slowly emerged from this entire process of exploration. This testing of the myth ...is basic to the Yoknapatawpha³ novels and stories. (Howe, 1962: 29)

As stated in the above quotation, the finest way for Faulkner to form a mythical rendition was to create a fictional world of his own in which he could convey his keen notion of the downfall of the previously eminent Southern tradition. Subsequently, patterned upon his hometown, Lafayette County, Oxford, Mississippi, he created his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, the capital city of which is

³ This fictional county, in which most of Faulkner's novels are set, is situated in Mississippi. It is bounded by the Tallahatchie River on the north, and the Yoknapatawpha River on the south. The region was initially inhabited by the Chickasaw Indian tribe. The word Yoknapatawpha derived from two Chickasaw words: 'yocona' and 'petopha', and it means 'split land'. The map of the county, drawn by Faulkner himself, was included in *Absalom, Absalom!*, published in 1936. According to this map, the area of the county is 2400 square miles, and it is populated by 6298 whites, and 9313 Negroes. Due to Faulkner's inspiration of his actual hometown, Yoknapatawpha County stands for Oxford; and its capital city, Jefferson, stands for Lafayette County.

Jefferson. Faulkner's endeavor and aim in creating a legend of his own become apparent in his following statements:

...I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and that by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other people, so I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too. The fact that I have moved my characters around in time successfully, at least in my own estimation, proves to me my theory that time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people... (French, Kidd, 1968: 141)

Indeed, the 'cosmos' Faulkner created served as a device to demonstrate the reasons and outcomes of the Southern moral descent in terms of his own appreciation. The characters he created are all typical of the history of the South. All of the families inhabiting Yoknapatawpha County represent the theme of decline in terms of morality, wealth, and status. The social status of the residents ranges from noble aristocrats to common lower-class people who do not act within the frame of customary Southern conducts. In his essay *Faulkner's Mythology*, George Marion O'Donnell gives a description of Faulkner's characters as such:

In Mr. Faulkner's mythology there are two kinds of characters; they are Sartorises or Snopeses⁴, whatever the family names may be. And in the spiritual geography of Mr. Faulkner's work there are two worlds: the Sartoris world and the Snopes world. In all of his successful books, he is exploring the two worlds in detail, dramatizing the inevitable conflict between them... The Sartorises act traditionally; that is to say, they act always with an ethically responsible will. They represent vital morality... Being antitraditional, the Snopeses are immoral from the Sartoris point of view. But the Snopeses do not recognize this point of view; acting only for self-interest, they acknowledge no ethical duty. (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 83)

⁴ Flem Snopes is the leading figure of the Snopes tradition. *The Hamlet* and *The Town* are the novels which depict his story. Colonel John Sartoris, who takes place in many of Faulkner's novels, is the leading figure of the Sartoris tradition. He is a character which Faulkner created depending upon his glorious great-grandfather, William Clark Falkner, and he epitomizes all of the attributes of a noble Southern gentleman. His story takes place in *Sartoris* and *The Unvanquished*.

The aristocrat families which ‘represent vital morality’ and were once eminent are exemplified by the Compsons⁵ in *The Sound and the Fury*⁶. (1929) They conform all of the necessities of the long-established conventions of the Southern aristocracy. In contrast to such upper-class representatives of nobility, the members of the Snopes world display complete deviation from the manners of the Southern tradition. The Bundrens in *As I Lay Dying* (1930) represent the truly poor families which are in an everlasting struggle of survival. Their poverty and ignorance make it impossible for them to act within the frame of Southern aristocracy. Additionally, Thomas Sutpen of *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) stands for the morally corrupted man whose only purpose is to become rich and powerful through undesirable, even illegal means.

As stated formerly, Faulkner intended to touch on the discordance of the past and the present states of the South by ‘sublimating the actual into the apocryphal’. The clash of the presently vague but once determined and indivisible aspirations and visions of the past; and the feeble, inconsistent, and preoccupied state of the present are depicted by the Yoknapatawpha inhabitants who are in an unceasing experience of controversy. In *The Life of William Faulkner*, Richard Gray indicates the condition of the Southerners Faulkner employed in his novels as such:

...Southerners of Faulkner’s generation felt themselves to be haunted by ghosts and, in effect, rendered impotent by them. In their case, those ghosts came from the general, social and cultural past than from the personal, but the consequences were essentially the same. They felt denied the capacity for meaningful action; they sought escape from the cunning passages and contrived corridors of history but found, for the most part, no way out. (Gray, 1996: 24)

The Compsons in *The Sound and the Fury* stand for one of the most important instances of such an experience of being haunted by the past. Unable to reconcile with the exhaustion of the tradition which constitutes their history, they become one of the once prominent Southern families which inevitably fail to resist the aftermath

⁵ The residential areas of all of the families mentioned are demonstrated in the map of Yoknapatawpha County, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) published by Random House, Inc., 1964.

⁶ The title of the novel is from William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, which is his shortest play. It is about the tragedy of a brave soldier, Macbeth, who later becomes the King of Scotland. He is easily tempted to become a sinful man as a result of his desire to be powerful.

of the Civil War. The Compsons' suffering of the loss of wealth and status gradually results in either their losing touch with reality or acting against the traditional moral code of the South. Along with the phenomenon of the modern world, the degradation of the aristocratic values leaves the family devoid of preserving their moral conducts necessitated by the history of the region. Yearning despondently to pursue their established standards, each member of the Compson household displays the economical, social, and psychological outcomes of the fall of the Southern aristocracy. Thus, the family constitutes of an alcoholic father (Jason Compson III), a hypochondriac mother (Caroline Compson), and their four children who display moral decay thoroughly. Their eldest son, Quentin, commits suicide as a result of his obsession with the loss of his sister Caddy's⁷ purity. Because of her headstrong nature, Caddy becomes a promiscuous woman. She is repudiated by her mother due to her marriage to a man who is not the father of her child. However, her mother's contempt does not change the fact of her being the center of her brothers' lives. Jason (IV), the middle son, becomes such a materialistic man that he defrauds his own mother without hesitation. Last but not least, Benjy⁸, the youngest Compson son, is mentally retarded, and is in a constant experience of deprivation, both physically and emotionally.

It is understandable that the domestic affairs in such a household are disappointing. Irving Howe's poetic description of the present state of the Compsons' familial relations clarifies this situation:

For the Compsons the family is less a tie of blood than a chafe of guilt. Love can exist only as a memory of childhood, and memory only as a gall. Morality becomes a conscience-spur to the wish for death. Money is the universal solvent, replacing affection, integrity, and every other sentiment beyond calculation. All this, of course, is notoriously morbid and excessive, as literature often is; but morbidity and excess apart, the world of the Compsons should not be too difficult for us to acknowledge (Howe, 1962: 48)

⁷ 'Caddy' is the short version of Candace. Everybody except Mrs. Compson calls her by her nickname. Mrs. Compson's insistence on this matter is a result of her hatred to nicknames.

⁸ 'Benjy' is the short version of Benjamin. It is a nickname first used by Caddy. As in Caddy's situation, everybody except Mrs. Compson calls him by his nickname.

As stated in the excerpt, the Compsons' understanding of morality is one of degeneration. The debasement, which every member of the household displays, was unpleasantly difficult for Faulkner to portray. Thus, he conveyed the narration of the first three sections of *The Sound and the Fury* to the three Compson sons who epitomize moral decline in different terms. Undoubtedly, Faulkner's depiction of decadence through the people who experience it in person has a considerable contribution to the formation of his mythical presentation. As his legendary exposition depends mostly upon the theme of repetition, Faulkner exposes the Compsons' tragic story of downfall through different perspectives. Thus, the same story, told again and again, becomes one of a legend. Likewise, the narration of the last section serves Faulkner's design of mythical presentation. Although generally referred to as Dilsey's⁹ section; it constitutes of Faulkner's narration in the third person. The employment of third person narration is to provide the reader with an objective point of view to the Compson household and the tragedy that they undergo. After a sequence of personal presentations, Faulkner's portrayal appears as an impartial criticism to the whole of what constitutes the Compsons, and the exhausted Southern aristocracy which they represent. Consequently, Faulkner's preference of making the characters narrate their experience, and the authorial voice serve his portrayal in terms of his desire to remain distant to the critique of his own history. Likewise, the idea of repetition enables the narrative to acquire a legendary attribute, thus, becoming a crucial element in Faulkner's mythical presentation.

In brief, *The Sound and the Fury* can be regarded as a comprehensive epitome of Faulkner's notion of history, and his devotedness to the moral conducts of Southern aristocracy. The novel's depiction of the Compsons' moral decline, in a broader context, stands for the decadence of the grandiose old South. Indeed, with its fictional setting and multiple perspectives, *The Sound and the Fury* can be considered one of Faulkner's masterpieces which portray his own history as a legend.

⁹ Dilsey is the black housekeeper of the Compsons. She is a witness of both the glorious days of the past and the dishonorable days of the present.

1.1 The Destructiveness of Time and the Notion of the Past:

The Disintegration of the Compsons

...To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.¹⁰

The collapse of the integrity of the Compson family can be handled in terms of their inability to accept the exhaustion of their pre-Civil War notability. As stated in the quotation from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the Compsons' present life is merely a shadow of its past. Their ineffectiveness in reconciling with the new state of the South and their disregard of the exhaustion of the once eminent Southern aristocracy drag them into indifference, self-absorption, and emotional depravity. Therefore, life becomes an endless ordeal, 'signifying nothing'. The members of the Compson household will be examined in terms of the consequences of their inability to reconcile with the devastation of the Old South.

Pride, gallantry, and protecting family honor are the salient features of Southern aristocracy which should normally be associated with the head of a family which has aristocratic origins. However, in contrast to the mighty effect of such attributes, Mr. Jason Compson (III) appears as a totally ineffective figure within his familial relations. David Minter gives a brief description of the head of the Compson household as an impotent, nihilistic alcoholic who amuses himself with the feelings and demands of his children. He is unsuccessful at displaying the tenderness and benevolence he feels for them. (Minter, 1980: 97) Mr. Compson's following statements to his son Quentin (the exact date is unknown) clarify his nihilism and failure as a father:

¹⁰ From William Shakespeare's "*Macbeth*" in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, The Edition of The Shakespeare Head Press Oxford, published by Barnes and Noble, Inc, 1994, 882.

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. (*The Sound and the Fury*,¹¹ 129)

The excerpt is an instance of the *notable* life experience Mr. Compson acquired throughout years. Unaware of the sensitive nature of his son, he constantly brings out ideas about the displacement of the self within time in relation to sorrow and disappointment. Consequently, as an inconsiderate father, he drags his son into a physical and emotional experience of dispossession. The quotation is also a depiction of Mr. Compson's nihilism. His cynical attitude leads him to an understanding of time as the primal concept which ruins man's life. As long as the concept of time exists, man is doomed to a successive experience of 'misfortunes'. Succumbed to fatalism, he believes that there is nothing he can do to change the course of the events which signal the disintegration of his family.

It is apparent that Mr. Compson's nihilism is an attempt to escape from the struggle of getting over the agitation that befalls his household. Still, it is a futile attempt to maintain the honor of his family by sending Quentin to Harvard for a prestigious education. By giving up a considerable amount of land, he risks the welfare of his family so that Quentin can perpetuate the prominence he has failed to conserve. However, Quentin's realization of his father's indifference to the ideals of Southern aristocracy drags him into a process of emotional conflict. Cleanth Brooks depicts Mr. Compson's influence on Quentin as follows:

Quentin was apparently very close to his father and the influence of his father on him was obviously very powerful. The whole of the Quentin section is saturated with what "Father said" and with references to comparisons that Father used and observations about life that Father made. Though his father seems to have counseled acquiescence in the meaninglessness of existence, it is plain that it was from him that Quentin derived his high notion of the claims of honor. (Brooks, 1963: 336)

Thus, distressed by his sister's promiscuity, Quentin seeks remedy in his father's life experience. However, Mr. Compson's acknowledgement of his daughter's disgrace as a natural flaw triggers Quentin's suicidal feelings. In view of Quentin's understanding of morality, it is unacceptable that his father "...loves people through

¹¹ All quotations are taken from the 1956 version which is published by Random House, Inc.

their shortcomings.” (124) Mr. Compson believes that Quentin’s discomfort in this matter is the outcome of his own virginity; and with his nihilistic approach, he regards the concept as trivial. Quentin’s memory flow in the following quotation exemplifies the clash between the father and son about the notion of virginity:

... Father said 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 is hurting you not Caddy and I said That’s just words and he said So is virginity and I said you don’t know. You cant know and he said Yes.¹² (143)

Retreating into nihilism, Mr. Compson remains indifferent to his daughter’s promiscuity. However, it is significant that the former bearer of the moral values of Southern aristocracy turns out to be an impotent man who regards the concept of virginity only as ‘words’. According to Richard Gray, the reason for Mr. Compson’s transformation is a consequence of his disappointment about women:

Mr. Compson is a disillusioned idealist, and one of the things he has clearly become disillusioned with is women - or rather, Woman. Having subscribed once to the cult of Southern Womanhood, according to which some women at least are regarded as ‘virgins’, he has now come to see them all as contaminated by sexuality and ‘periodical filth’ [159]: as all ‘whores’ with ‘*a natural affinity for evil*’. [119] ‘No woman is to be trusted’ [130], he tells Quentin. What he means is that he ‘trusted’ Woman once, in other words idealized her; and that, when she turned out to be real rather than ideal, he felt humiliated and betrayed. (Gray, 1996: 45)

With the decline of Southern aristocracy, Mr. Compson realizes the insignificance and futility of attributing the concepts of purity and virginity to women. As his wife, the woman whom he has idealized throughout years fails to maintain her dignity and perseverance, Mr. Compson becomes aware of the fact that there is no ‘ideal’ woman. Nevertheless; as a result of his devotedness to the traditional moral conducts, Quentin is unable to reconcile with his father’s cynical approach to women. By uttering such insensitive words which are in conflict with the traditional Southern values of virtue, Mr. Compson unconsciously drags his son into suicide. The following statements of Richard P. Adams explain Quentin’s situation:

His [Faulkner’s] most completely defeated characters, such as Quentin Compson... go down because they are fundamentally opposed to life. They

¹² The disruption of grammatical rules is one of the major stylistic attributes of Faulkner’s works. The style of the author will be handled in the coming sections.

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. (Adams, 1968: 13)

For Quentin, the crucial thing to depend upon was his father's unflinching dignity. However, Mr. Compson's weakness destroys Quentin's faith in his ideal of preserving the moral integrity of his family. As he cannot pass beyond the shadow of the past, it is impossible for him to face with the degeneration of the present. Quentin's realization of the impossibility of fulfilling the Southern tradition renders his suicide inevitable. John T. Matthews explains Quentin's motives for suicide as follows:

This son of the South [Quentin] (he never becomes a son of Harvard) cannot escape the conviction that the past is nothing but catastrophe- the catastrophe of the ... aristocratic decline in the New South, and the humiliation of a ruined family. Like so many other Southerners, Quentin sees nothing but a legacy of loss. His suicide suggests that he refuses to accept the repetition of that past in his future. (Matthews, 1991: 62)

The 'legacy of loss' which Quentin inherits from his father deprives him of the resolution which is necessary to cope with the downfall of the Southern aristocracy. In fact, towards the end of his memory flow, it becomes clear that Quentin is paralyzed by the past. His remarks about Colonel Sartoris and his grandfather can be considered a yearning for the glorious days when they were alive:

It used to be I thought of death as a man something like Grandfather a friend of his a kind of private and particular friend like we used to think of Grandfather's desk not to touch it not even to talk loud in the room where it was I always thought of them as being together somewhere all the time waiting on a high place beyond cedar trees Colonel Sartoris was on a still higher place looking out across at something and they were waiting for him to get done looking at it and come down Grandfather wore his uniform and we could hear the murmur of their voices from beyond the cedars they were always talking and Grandfather was always right (218, 219)

It is clear that Quentin takes seriously the norms of the traditional past. Nevertheless, in contrast to the noble Colonel Sartoris and the grandfather 'who was always right,' Mr. Compson stands as a feeble figure. Quentin's disillusionment about his father can be regarded as one of the major reasons which drive him to suicide. Thus, Mr. Compson's attempt to preserve the notability of his family by sending Quentin to

Harvard is futile. Indeed, Mr. Compson's impotence as a father and his death as a result of alcoholism can be regarded as the basis of the downfall of his family in terms of morality and wealth.

Just like Mr. Compson, Mrs. Compson is unable to get over the clash between the past and the present states of the South. Her reasons can be considered the same with those of her husband's; however, there is an additional reason for Mrs. Compson's failure of reconciliation with the new South. Within Southern aristocracy, women were associated with the notions of purity, chastity, and virtue. They were regarded as the devoted and affectionate protectors of their families. Furthermore, the fact that they were acknowledged as artifacts prevented them from developing intellectual capacity. They were educated; however, not to discuss social issues, but to fulfill the necessity of a reputable education which suited the grandeur of their tradition. Their pre-determined role within society made them appear as ineffective figures in terms of social issues. Thus, their only concern was displaying the affluence and nobility of their family by wearing glaring dresses at showy and artificial parties. Nevertheless; after the Civil War, none of these attributes of eminence were considered important. Women of Southern gentry appeared as no more than shadows of their past splendor. The exhaustion of the once favored values rendered them incapable of maintaining their role as protectors of the perfection of their household. Consequently, there was nothing they could do but witness the disintegration of their families. Mrs. Caroline (Bascomb¹³) Compson stands as a perfect example of a woman who follows the line of such a descent.

The clash between the traditional concept of woman and the new conducts are seriously challenging for Mrs. Compson to deal with. It is impossible for her to act contrary to the frame of behavior which she internalized throughout her life. As a consequence of her incompetence to get over this conflict, she retreats into hypochondria and self-absorption, just as her husband takes shelter in nihilism and fatalism. Mrs. Compson prefers to act as if nothing extraordinary is going around her because she "cannot bear the prospect that her world will no longer behave according

¹³ 'Bascomb' was Mrs. Compson's family name before her marriage. She feels a meaningless insecurity about the notability of her family name, and constantly compares the nobility of the Bascombs with the Compsons.

to the traditions of leisure and authority she thinks are her due.” (Matthews, 1991: 39) She secludes herself into her ivory tower¹⁴ in order not to get involved in the issues that her family undergoes, and regards the tragedy of her family as an outcome of the damnation they are all exposed to. Undoubtedly, such attributes prove Mrs. Compson to be an insufficient mother. Incapable of fulfilling the responsibilities of motherhood, she depends upon her black servant Dilsey for the care of her own children along with the order of an entire household. In his essay *Man, Time, and Eternity*, Cleanth Brooks states his view of Mrs. Compson as such:

The basic cause of the breakup of the Compson family...is the cold and self-centered mother who is sensitive about the social status of her own family, the Bascombs, who feels the birth of an idiot son [Benjy] as a kind of personal affront, who spoils and corrupts her favorite son [Jason], and who withholds any real love and affection from her children and her husband. (Brooks, 1963: 334)

As stated in the quotation, Mrs. Compson’s selfishness and her negligence of her children deprive them of the maternal love. Rather than showing concern to her children’s needs, she focuses her entire energy on her obsession with the family name and pride. Her endeavor to change the name of her mentally retarded son can be considered a direct consequence of such a preoccupation. Because she regards her own blood as distinguished, she looks up to her own family name, Bascomb, by naming her youngest son after her brother, Maury. Nonetheless, as a result of the fact that the boy’s retardation is a handicap for his being an heir to her family, Maury’s name is changed to Benjamin at the age of five. Moreover, her fixation upon family name causes her to repudiate her daughter Caddy because of the disgrace she brings upon the family with her marriage to a man who is not the father of her child. After ending her relationship with Caddy, Mrs. Compson’s unchangeable arrogance makes her forbid the family members to speak of her. Thus, Caddy receives the news of her father’s death by chance, while reading the newspaper.

Mrs. Compson’s misconception of herself as a representative of Southern gentility drags both herself and her family into a sequence of losses which cause her family’s disintegration. Her lack of self-criticism estranges her from the harsh facts

¹⁴ The term ‘ivory tower’ comes from the Christian tradition. It is a symbol of gentle purity which also connotes isolation.

of life; consequently, she becomes alienated to everything that goes around her. Mrs. Compson's self-centeredness affects Quentin the most, and he is the only Compson child who directly gives a voice to his experience of the absence of his mother, as he says: "...if I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother..." (213) It is clear that Quentin's lack of maternal love is a consequence of Mrs. Compson's absent presence. Her detached manner causes her to ignore the fact that the suicide of her son, Quentin, is a direct result of her remoteness. This is apparent in her following statements:

"I don't know. What reason did Quentin have? Under God's heaven what reason did he have? It can't be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I'm a lady. You might not believe that from my offspring [Caddy], but I am." (374)

Hence, Mrs. Compson believes that she is under God's special protection. Nevertheless, such a misconception brings about nothing but the figure of a feeble and an inert woman. Even the tragic death of her son does not make her realize her failure as a mother. Thus, she can do nothing but lament for the losses her family encounters.

It is ironic that Jason is the only child whom Mrs. Compson favors as a mother. She disregards the fact that her second son "has grown into a cold, selfish, inhuman man." (Brooks, 1983: 43) Hence, she openly discriminates her children because of her acknowledgement of Jason as a true 'Bascomb.' Quentin's following memory flow about his mother's statements of her children exemplifies this situation:

...I'll take Jason and go where nobody knows us so he'll have a chance to grow up and forget all this the others don't love me they have never loved anything with that streak of Compson selfishness and false pride Jason was the only one my heart went out to without dread (126)

...never since she [Caddy] opened her eyes has she given me one unselfish thought at times I look at her I wonder if she can be my child except Jason he has never given me one moment's sorrow since I first held him in my arms I knew then that he was to be my joy and my salvation I thought that Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed... (127)

...she [Caddy] not only drags your name in dirt but corrupts the very air your children breathe Jason [Mr. Compson] you must let me go away I cannot stand it let me have Jason and you keep the others they're not my flesh and blood like he is strangers nothing of mine and I am afraid of them... (128)

It is clear that Mrs. Compson dislikes Caddy, Quentin and Benjy because she regards them as tainted by Compson 'selfishness' and blood. She repudiates her daughter because of her promiscuity, as she considers it as a norm of womanhood since in her view "a woman is either a lady or not" (127). She deprives Benjy of her love as she considers his idiocy a penalty of her sins. However; because of her affection to Jason, Mrs. Compson takes pride in his becoming the head of the family after Mr. Compson's death. Yet, her blindness prevents her from seeing the fact that she is deceived by her son though she depends upon him in every way. Jason's dishonesty can be exemplified by the case about the checks Caddy sends for the upkeep of her child, Quentin¹⁵ (II). Mrs. Compson rejects to use the money sent by her daughter. The reason for this becomes apparent during one of her check-destroying ceremonies. She states, "We Bascombs need nobody's charity. Certainly not that of a fallen woman." (273) However, she is not aware of the fact that the checks she has been destroying throughout years are the fake ones which Jason arranges after cashing the real ones. It is obvious that Mrs. Compson's blindfold confidence in Jason within such important matters plays a crucial role in the breakdown of her family's morality.

Another example of Jason's immoral materialism is the deal he makes with Caddy during Mr. Compson's funeral. Despite her mother's rejection, Caddy goes to her father's funeral without being noticed. However, Jason notices her and they have a quick talk. Caddy offers Jason fifty dollars in return for seeing little Quentin for only a moment. After a feigned reluctance, he agrees to show her the baby in exchange for a hundred dollars. By telling a series of lies to the family members, Jason manages to take Quentin out of the house in a raincoat. However, he makes the driver pass so fast that Caddy can only have a glimpse of her child. The following dialogue between Caddy and Jason is an illustration of why Jason hates Caddy so much, and his reasons of evading the propriety of the deal they make:

¹⁵ Quentin, also referred to as "Miss Quentin", is Caddy's illegitimate child. Caddy is forced to leave her child to her family after her repudiation.

“Hello, Jason,” she says, holding out her hand. We shook hands.

“What are you doing here?” I says. “I thought you promised her [Mrs. Compson] you wouldn’t come back here. I thought you had more sense than that.”

...

“I’m not surprised though,” I says. I wouldn’t put anything past you. You don’t mind anybody. You don’t give a damn about anybody.”

“Oh,” she says, “that job.” She looked at the grave [of Mr. Compson]. “I’m sorry about that, Jason.”

“I bet you are,” I says. You’ll talk mighty meek now. But you needn’t come back. There’s not anything [any money] left...”

“I don’t want anything,” she says. She looked at the grave. “Why didn’t they let me know?” she says. “I just happened to see it in the paper. On the back page. Just happened to.”

...

“We don’t even know your name at that house,” I says. “Do you know that? We don’t even know you with him [Benjy] and Quentin,” I says. “Do you know that?”

“I know it”, she says. “Jason,” she says, looking at the grave, “if you’ll fix it so I can see her a minute I’ll give you fifty dollars.” (251, 252)

As she does not hesitate to bribe Jason, it is clear that Caddy is aware of her brother’s materialism and greed, and she is proven to be right when he says after betraying his sister: “And so I counted the money again that night and put it away, and I didn’t feel so bad.” (255)

Due to his lack of sensitivity, Jason does not feel bad about treating his niece in the worst way possible. In Jason’s section, *April Sixth, 1928*, Miss Quentin appears as a young woman who attracts attention with her sexuality. Although Mrs. Compson desires to raise her in a perfect way in accordance with the norms of Southern womanhood, she cannot give importance to her education because of economic reasons. However, Jason uses the money Caddy sends for her daughter’s education for his private expenses by lying to the family members. Certainly, the lies he tells to Miss Quentin are about the payment she should be receiving. Because of her suspicions about Jason’s honesty in the transfer of the money to her daughter, Caddy has decided to send a money order rather than a check. Undoubtedly, Jason will have to make Quentin sign the money order in order to cash the fifty dollars Caddy has sent to her daughter. While he is thinking of a scheme to handle this situation, Quentin enters his office in a restless manner, asking for money. She tells Jason lies about why she needs money and asks if there is a letter for her from her mother. After distracting her attention with his silly stubbornness, he manages to

convince her that the money Caddy has sent for her is only ten dollars. Taking advantage of her uneasiness, Jason makes Quentin sign the money order without difficulty. When Quentin tells him she knows that her mother has sent a lot of money for her, he reminds her of how Mrs. Compson has destroyed the checks. In this way, Jason fulfills his economic desires behind his mother's back.

The fact that her daughter has become a fallen woman makes Mrs. Compson highly sensitive about the upbringing of Miss Quentin. However, her concern for her granddaughter can be considered in the same line with the rest of her children. She aims to prevent Quentin to follow her mother's track, but she is unable to treat her with tenderness and love. The following quotation is a depiction of Mrs. Compson's uneasiness about Caddy's old room becoming baby Quentin's room:

So we carried the cradle down and Dilsey started to set it up in her [Caddy's] old room. Then mother started sure enough.

"Hush, Miss Cahline," Dilsey says, "You gwine wake her [baby Quentin] up."

"In there?" Mother says, "To be contaminated by that atmosphere? It'll be hard enough as it is, with the heritage she already has." (246)

Obviously, almost every statement about Quentin depicts the fact that Mrs. Compson's fear of her becoming a corrupt woman has become real. In the beginning of the third section of the novel, Miss Quentin begs Dilsey for another cup of coffee; though it is time for her to leave home for school. Jason gets mad because of her cheap looks and they begin a fight which depicts their cruel and debased treatment of each other:

She brushed her hair back from her face, her kimono slipping off her shoulder. "You put that cup down and come in here for a minute," I says.

...

She quit looking at me. She looked at Dilsey.

"What time is it, Dilsey?" she says. "When it's ten seconds, you whistle. Just a half cup. Dilsey, pl-"

I grabbed her by the arm. She dropped the cup. It broke on the floor and she jerked back, looking at me, but I held her arm...

I dragged her into the dining room. Her kimono came unfastened, flapping about her, damn near naked. (227, 228)

Throughout Jason's section, nearly all of the descriptions of Miss Quentin include sexual connotations. However, Mrs. Compson is not capable of getting over her granddaughter's immoral attitude. As she still believes in the validity of the values of

the exhausted Southern code of morality, she talks about the proper conducts of the times when she was a girl. In return for this, Jason states: “You had somebody to make you behave yourself...She hasn’t.” (295)

Jason’s mistreatment of Miss Quentin can be explained by his vengeful feelings to Caddy. According to John T. Matthews, “Jason seethes at Caddy through her daughter...” (Matthews, 1991: 70) Nevertheless, it is obvious that Jason’s abuse of her sister and the grandmother’s ignorance of this relationship results in her emotional depravity. As a result of her self-absorption, Mrs. Compson states: “I think she [Miss Quentin] is the judgment of Caddy and Quentin upon me.” (325) Against her grandmother’s remark, it is clear that Quentin is aware of the way she dispossesses her. She regrets her birth and says: “I’m bad and I’m going to hell, and I don’t care. I’d rather be in hell than anywhere where you [Jason] are.” (235) Because of her hatred to everyone and everything around her, Quentin does not hesitate to betray the family members. She runs away by taking all the money Jason keeps locked up in his safe. Quentin locks her door and leaves the house by climbing the tree next to her window. At first, they all think that she has committed suicide, just like her late uncle Quentin. However, as Jason finds out that his money is missing, they all realize that she has run away with her boyfriend. Jason manages to open the door; however, he cannot see anything except her personal belongings. The description of Quentin’s room depicts the moral degradation she represents thoroughly:

It was not a girl’s room. It was not anybody’s room, and the faint scent of cheap cosmetics and the few feminine objects and the other evidences of crude and hopeless efforts to feminize it but added to its anonymity, giving it that dead and stereotyped transience of rooms in assignation houses. The bed had not been disturbed. On the floor lay a soiled undergarment of cheap silk a little too pink; from a half open bureau drawer dangled a single stocking. (352)

Nearly everything about Miss Quentin is reminiscent of her mother. Her climbing down the tree in order to do something which is forbidden, and her ‘soiled undergarment’ recalls the events that are central for Caddy’s life. It is inevitable that, Quentin becomes the epitome of the degeneration within the Compson household. Still, as a consequence of her detachment, Mrs. Compson refuses to acknowledge the moral decline and disintegration of her family.

The Compsons' weakening and eventual breakdown can unconditionally be associated with Mrs. Compson's weakness, aloofness, and self-absorption. Because of such defects, she never manages to value the people who truly deserve appraisal. As stated above, her appreciation of Jason though he is an untrustworthy, materialist man accelerates the family's ethical degeneration. Nonetheless, her disregard of the mentally retarded Benjy, her indifference to Quentin, and her repudiation of Caddy bring about the indispensable collapse of the family. Eventually, Mrs. Compson's final image is that of a "...mother whose children lose her before she ever allows them to possess her." (Minter, 1994: 377)

Contrary to Mrs. Compson's example of the traditional the aristocrat woman, her daughter Caddy is a total deviation from the established and idealized Southern female roles because of her headstrong nature. She becomes a promiscuous woman by losing her virginity to a man she doesn't consider marrying. She carries on her extramarital relationships, which shock her family and finally, she is repudiated both by her husband and her mother because of her illegitimate child. John T. Matthews describes Caddy's situation as such:

Caddy does refuse to obey the dictates of her community. She rejects the patriarchy's insistence on virginity as a condition for proper marriageability. She follows her own desires, decides against fulfilling the role of mother [by abandoning her daughter], and flaunts her ability to make money independently. (Matthews, 1991: 92)

However; Faulkner's depiction of Caddy as such is an example of his realization of the radical changes that the Southern aristocracy is experiencing. Caddy's outlook to a new way of life is not only a source of distress for the family, but also a courageous act to challenge the clash of values of the past and the present. Faulkner clarifies this situation through the scene in which Caddy climbs a pear tree. The four Compson children are not allowed to be present in the funeral parlor of their grandmother Damuddy¹⁶ because of their age. Faulkner explains his feelings about this scene as, "...they were three boys¹⁷, one was a girl and the girl was the only one that was

¹⁶ Damuddy is the Compson children's maternal grandmother. She dies in the year 1898, when Benjy (Maury at this point) is three, Caddy is seven. The exact ages of Quentin and Jason are unknown.

¹⁷ Presumably, Quentin is nine or ten years old as he attends college in 1910. Thus, as the middle son who is younger than Caddy and older than Benjy, Jason must be between seven and three years of age.

brave enough to climb that tree to look in the forbidden window to see what was going on. ... and it took the rest of the four hundred pages [of *The Sound and the Fury*] to explain why she was brave enough to climb the tree to look in the window.” (Adams, 1968: 218)

Despite her displacement in the family, Caddy is still present in the center of the novel. She has a special place in the lives of the family members. She compensates for the maternal love which Mrs. Compson withholds from Benjy; she ironically becomes Quentin’s obsession with purity, and she is the object of hatred for Jason because of her divorce from Herbert Head¹⁸, which results in his losing a good job. However, her climbing the pear tree can also be regarded as her climbing out of her brothers’ lives; thus, her becoming the absent center of the novel. The incidents prior to her peeping at the funeral parlor are of significance in terms of what kind of a person she is to become in the future. On the day of the funeral, the Compson children play in the branch near their house. Benjy’s memories about the branch scene foreshadow Caddy’s absence in the lives of her brothers:

I hushed and got in the water and Roskus¹⁹ came and said to come to supper and Caddy said,
It’s not supper time yet. I’m not going.
She was wet. We were playing in the branch and Caddy squatted down and got her dress wet and Versh²⁰ said,
“Your mommer going to whip you for getting your dress wet.”
“She’s not going to do any such thing.” Caddy said.
“How do you know.” Quentin said. (19)
...
“I’ll take it off.” she said. “Then it’ll dry.”
“I bet you wont.” Quentin said.
“I bet I will.” Caddy said.
“I bet you better not.” Quentin said. (20)
...
“You just take your dress off.” Quentin said.
Caddy took her dress off and threw it on the bank. Then she didn’t have on anything but her bodice and drawers, and Quentin slapped her and she slipped and fell down in the water. When she got up she

¹⁸ Herbert Head is the man who divorces Caddy upon learning that he is not the father of her child. He is a rich man who owns a bank and he offers a job to Jason as a favor. However, Jason never has a chance to work at the bank because of their divorce.

¹⁹ Roskus is Dilsey’s husband. He is a servant to the Compsons like his wife. He is a superstitious man and he thinks that Benjy is the embodiment of the curse upon the Compson family.

²⁰ Versh is the oldest son of Dilsey and Roskus and he is Benjy’s first caretaker.

began to splash water on Quentin, and Quentin splashed water on Caddy. (20, 21)

...

“Now I guess you’re satisfied.” Quentin said,

“We’ll both get whipped now.”

“I don’t care.” Caddy said.

“Yes you will.” Quentin said.

“I’ll run away and never come back.” Caddy said.

I began to cry. ...Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I started to cry... (21)

The case between Caddy and Quentin can be regarded as hinting at the line of Caddy’s digression from the established norms of morality, and her eventual disappearance from the lives of her brothers. Her undressing is too feminine for a seven-year-old girl, and her muddying the drawers she is wearing, in this respect, symbolizes her future promiscuity. Furthermore, the tension between Caddy and Quentin becomes stronger as the years go by. As an oversensitive young man, Quentin can never manage to acknowledge the life style she adopts. In relation to Caddy’s lack of chastity, he constantly blames himself for his inability to protect the honor of his family. Eventually, the harshness of the facts about his sister drives Quentin to suicide.

Despite her disrespectful state as a woman, Caddy’s self-determination in playing the mother figure to her brothers can be considered as a strong influence in maintaining the wholeness of the family. Mr. Compson tells the children to be quiet after they return home from the branch. Caddy asks the reason for this, and immediately says, “Let them mind me tonight, Father.” (28) However, the children hear their mother crying upstairs, in the funeral parlor. Aware of the fact that Damuddy is sick, the three boys think that something bad has happened to her. In the meantime, Caddy is trying to reassure her brothers by telling them that there is a party going on upstairs, and the voice they heard was of someone who was singing. Apart from the funeral scene, Caddy’s compensation for the absence of Mrs. Compson is especially significant in her relation to Benjy. John T. Matthews comments upon this situation as follows:

Three years older than her mentally retarded youngest brother, Candace Compson has taken on the role of nursemaid and protector for Benjy through their childhood. Benjy is unequipped to deal with any but the simplest events in his life, so Caddy helps him dress, explains his surroundings to him...;

tries to interpret his garbled speech...; and even soothes Benjy at night by sleeping in his bed... (Matthews, 1991: 38)

In view of the above quotation, Caddy's willingness to play the mother figure and her readiness to have her brothers under control are attempts of preserving the unity within the household. Nevertheless, such efforts prove to be worthless as her humiliation plays an important role in the disintegration of her family.

From her childhood on, it is clear that Caddy's attitude which challenges the propriety of Southern aristocracy signals her deviation from the established moral conducts. Despite the doubtfulness of the morality of her life style, Caddy stands as the only Compson who manages to get away from the tragic exhaustion of her family. However, her effect upon the disintegration of her family can be handled in terms of both the disgrace she brings upon the household and her absent presence in the lives of her brothers. The fact that she abandons her brothers as a dishonored woman results in their feebleness to hold onto their lives and their drift into an endless experience of tragedy. Indeed, her success in keeping herself away from the misfortune of her family proves to have no effect upon the maintenance of the household's integrity.

Obviously, the incorrigibility of time exposes the Compsons to a process of unrecoverable losses. The exhaustion of the grandiose Southern tradition can be considered an outcome of the indispensable effects of time. Consequently, the pre-eminent family can be regarded as defeated by the destructiveness of time. Faulkner depicts this tragic failure by the portrayal of a family of a nihilistic father, a self-absorbed mother, and a promiscuous daughter. It is clear that the mother, father and daughter play a crucial role in the moral disintegration of the family. Thus, Faulkner stresses on the fact that the harsh reality about the Southern aristocracy can only be traced by understanding and coping with the shadow of the past.

1.2. Integrity and Endurance: Dilsey

...she sang, to herself at first, something without particular tune or words, repetitive, mournful and plaintive, austere, as she ground a faint, steady snowing of flour onto the bread board. The stove had begun to heat the room and to fill it with murmurous minors of the fire, and presently she was singing louder, as if her voice too had been thawed out by the growing warmth, and then Mrs. Compson called her name again from within the house. Dilsey raised her face as if her eyes could and did penetrate the walls and ceiling²¹...

Throughout the narrative of *The Sound and the Fury*, Dilsey,²² the old and loyal black servant of the Compsons attracts attention with her wisdom and distinguished manners. As a result of her unflinching patience and faith in God, she appears as the only figure that can be regarded as undefeated by the harshness of the decline of the Southern aristocracy. It is not surprising that such admirable attributes of Dilsey play a crucial role within the bonds of the Compson household. In fact, she is the only character in the novel who maintains the integrity of the Compson family. However, her honesty and earnestness overburden her in her relations with the Compsons. Along with her responsibility of maintaining the order of the house, Dilsey takes care of the Compson siblings as if they were her children. As the only person who cares about Benjy's birthday, she makes a cake for him with the ingredients that she buys with her own money. She scolds Jason as if he was her own son, and she utters her desire to take care of Caddy's daughter Quentin. Indeed, with "her 'indomitable' physical presence, the warmth of her household routines and the comforting familiarity of her talk," she renders her place in the Compson household indispensable. (Gray, 1996: 149)

The fact that Dilsey lives within the same moral codes of the Southern aristocracy as the Compsons is ironic since she is an ex-slave. However, in contrast to the Compsons, her endurance and personal morality prevent her from being defeated by the degeneration to which the Southern tradition is exposed. As a matter of fact, Dilsey's constant presence in the Compson family enables her to develop an objective view of their moral decline. In the last section of the novel, *April Eighth*

²¹ From the fourth chapter of *The Sound and the Fury*, 336-337.

²² Dilsey is rarely spoken of with her surname, Gibson.

1928, she comments with her objectivity and sensibility²³ on the tragic fall of the family she witnesses. Carvel Collins comments upon Dilsey's section in this way:

The final section of *The Sound and the Fury* sets up, in contrast to the selfish Compsons, the loving servant Dilsey. Through her, readers see a better way which life might take, and thus they may feel some reduction of the novel's tragedy. But it remains a tragedy, nevertheless, for Dilsey is by no means able to offset the destructive effect of the Compsons' overwhelming emotional failure. (Stegner, 1965: 227)

It is noteworthy that Faulkner employed the black servant for criticizing and reflecting the destructiveness of the Compsons' 'emotional failure'. However, his aim is not racial. In giving Dilsey a central role, Faulkner evades the racial issues while concentrating on the views of the tradition of the Old South. Despite the delicacy of the matters of slavery, Dilsey's approach to the Compson degeneration stands out as a perfect example of impartiality. In his essay *Faulkner and the Negroes*, Irving Howe explains this situation as follows:

While Dilsey's strength and goodness may be acceptable to traditional paternalism, she gradually assumes a role not quite traditional for the Southern Negro; she becomes, toward the end of the book, an articulate moral critic, the observer with whom the action of the novel is registered and through whom its meanings are amplified... This is not to suggest that Dilsey is in any way a rebel against the old order of the Southern life. She regards most of the Compsons with contempt not because they are white or representative of the ruling social group but because they do not fulfill the obligations that have accrued to their status. Judging the whites in terms of their own proclaimed values, she criticizes not their exploitation of Negroes but their moral mistreatment of each other. (Minter, 1994: 275)

The Compsons' 'moral mistreatment of each other' is depicted through the personal experience of each character in the previous sections of *The Sound and the Fury*. Nevertheless, Dilsey's commentary in the last section portrays the whole picture of the unpleasant aspects of the Compsons. With her insight and maturity, she becomes the epitome of moral integrity in the novel.

Undoubtedly, Dilsey's stability is mainly an outcome of her being a devout Christian. As John T. Matthews puts forward, "Dilsey leads her life as if it were something she must endure to finally begin her real life with Jesus above."

²³ Faulkner presented his own criticism of the Compsons through Dilsey's narration.

(Matthews, 1991: 82, 83) Her unfailing piety and composure make her endure the displeasing events within the Compson household. In accordance with her religious beliefs, it is as if she is aware of the inevitability of the disintegration of the family. The following dialogue, which takes place in the scene of Benjy's name change,²⁴ depicts Dilsey's foresight in relation to her piousness:

*Reckon Maury going to let me cry on him a while, too.
His name's Benjy now, Caddy said.
How come it is, Dilsey said. He aint wore out the name he was born with yet, is he.
Benjamin came out of the Bible, Caddy said. It's a better name for him than Maury was.
How come it is, Dilsey said.
Mother says it is, Caddy said.
Huh, Dilsey said. Name aint going to help him. Hurt him, neither. Folks don't have no luck, changing names. My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me.
How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said.
It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out.
Can you read it, Caddy said.
Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here. (71)*

Dilsey's awareness of the futility of Benjy's name change signals the fact that there is nothing that can be done to change the tragic downfall of the Compsons. Moreover, her sensibility about the uselessness of changing names can be considered in terms of the notion of stability. Dilsey's understanding of life as a temporary state is a consequence of her view of the concept of time in relation to the concept of eternity. This is evident in the following statements of Cleanth Brooks:

...Dilsey's time includes the concept of eternity. She believes in an eternal order, and so the failures of the past, the daily disappointments, and her own meager prospects for the future, do not daunt her. Dilsey believes that goodness will prevail in time or, rather, in a realm outside time. She knows, then, what time is worth and what it is not worth, and so can properly evaluate time. (Brooks, 1983: 71)

In contrast to the Compsons who cannot pass beyond their exhausted prominence, Dilsey appreciates time within its true value. Thus, with her religious prospects, she appears as the only character in *The Sound and the Fury* who is able to reconcile

²⁴ Benjy's name is changed from Maury to Benjamin in the year 1900, when he is five years old.

with the concept of time, and hence, she can cope with the past and the present.

Undoubtedly, Dilsey's insight and piety enables her to be at peace with time. The most significant event which illustrates this is the Easter Sunday²⁵ sermon which is presented by Reverend Shegog.²⁶ On April Eight, 1928, Dilsey, Luster and Frony²⁷ go to church for their service. Meanwhile, disregarding the tense atmosphere Benjy creates; Dilsey does not hesitate to take him along. Dilsey and Frony's dialogue on the way to church is an example of Dilsey's perception of Benjy's condition:

"I wish you wouldn't keep on bringin him to church, mammy," Frony said. "Folks talkin."

...

"And I knows whut kind of folks," Dilsey said, "Trash white folks. Dat's who it is. Thinks he [Benjy] aint good enough fer white church, but nigger church aint good enough fer him."

"Dey talks, jes de same," Frony said.

"Den you send um to me," Dilsey said. "Tell um de good Lawd don't keer whether he smart er not. Don't nobody but white trash keer dat." (362)

The above quotation clarifies Dilsey's reliability and the fact that she is the only person who unquestionably cares about Benjy. Her sagacity and her undeviating loyalty to Christianity render awareness that God does not discriminate humans from each other. In Dilsey's view, it is only the white members of Southern aristocracy who make such discrimination. According to Cleanth Brooks, Dilsey's formerly mentioned aspects are a result of her sensible manners and her piety. (Brooks, 1963: 342)

Dilsey's faithfulness becomes clearer during the sermon. She is deeply moved, and as Reverend Shegog goes on preaching, tears slide down her cheeks. The reason for her sensitivity can be related to the religious figures and events that the

²⁵ Easter, also known as the 'Feast of Resurrection,' is the most important religious feast of Christianity. Depending upon Western and Eastern Christianity, it takes place in March, April and May. The feast celebrates the resurrection of Jesus.

²⁶ Reverend Shegog is a visiting preacher. His sermon is about the sacrificial death of Christ, his burial and his resurrection. He starts the sermon in the dialect of 'white man,' which fails to attract the attention of the congregation. Later on, he converts his voice to the black dialect. From then on, his influence on the congregation becomes so profound that some of them burst into tears.

²⁷ Frony is Dilsey's daughter. Luster is Frony's son, Dilsey's grandson. Despite the fact that he is a teenager, Luster becomes the caretaker of the thirty-three year old idiot Benjy.

preacher mentions. It is significant that the sermon seems to make a precise description of the disintegration of the Compsons. Reverend Shegog refers to the Israelites who “passed away in Egypt” (368). Correspondingly, in the Appendix²⁸ to the novel, Benjy is described as “...our last born, sold into Egypt.” (19) Shegog also addresses the congregation as, “Wus a rich man: whar he now, O breddren? Wus a po man: whar he now, O sistuhn?” (368, 369) This rich and poor man can be associated with the extremely materialist Jason who lives like a pauper although he has a considerable amount of money. Reverend Shegog goes on with his sermon by mentioning a mother who can be related to Mrs. Compson, “I hears de weepin en de lamentation of de po mammy widout de salvation en de word of God!” (369) As stated formerly, Mrs. Compson is a mother who can do nothing but lament for the degeneration of her family. She speaks of God’s name and holds onto her Bible only when she feels distressed about her inability to cope with the tragic events she encounters. Towards the end of the sermon, the attitude of one of the congregation members can be considered in association with Quentin’s drowning himself in Charles River, “... and still another, without words, like bubbles rising in water.” (370) Obviously, all of Reverend Shegog’s references are compatible with the characters and events which take place in the breakdown of the Compsons. Moreover, the fact that the allusion to Quentin’s suicide takes place at the end of the sermon hints at the inevitability of the disintegration of the family. Consequently, Quentin’s death can be regarded as the impossibility of continuing the ideals of the Old South.

It is apparent that in *The Sound and the Fury*, Shegog’s sermon serves for more than a religious illustration of the moral decline of the Southern aristocracy. It can be argued that Faulkner’s mythical presentation becomes significant throughout the preaching. As the sermon serves for the reflection of the Southern myth, it enables Faulkner to remain detached in his views about the unpleasant aspects of his region. According to John T. Matthews, Shegog’s preaching is a representation of Faulkner’s primary intention about what he wants to portray about the South:

²⁸ The quotations are from the Appendix for *The Sound and the Fury*, which is used in *The Sound and the Fury* published by Random House, Inc., 1946.

...the sermon offers an “orthodox” myth that explains the broadest historical realities of the South, the mutual legacies of black suffering, white exploitation and cultural collapse that are represented in the entwined stories of the Compsons and the Gibsons. The fall from innocence into historical knowledge suggested by Quentin’s misery, Jason’s ferocious efforts to preserve a social system in ruins, Caddy’s and her daughter’s flagrant defiance of that system, Dilsey’s quiet determination to subvert its authority even as she works within it- all these may be explained by the pattern of Edenic sin, the exile from the garden, the descent into labor, property, and domination, and the ultimate divine redemption of human failure. Spanned across the Easter weekend, the expiration of the Compson house may be read in this mythic framework. It is as if Shegog’s sermon also represents the author’s wish to see genuine coherence and significance emerge from this chronicle of his region’s decline and fall. (Matthews, 1991: 85)

As stated in the quotation, Faulkner presents a depiction of the corruption that takes place within his history through the ‘expiration of the Compson house.’ The bitterness of the conclusion becomes evident in Dilsey’s mournful state after the sermon. On the way back home, Dilsey’s face “did not quiver as the tears took their sunken and devious courses, walking with her head up, making no effort to dry them away even.” (371) Frony wants to make her stop crying because people are looking at them. However, Dilsey is still under the influence of the sermon and she does not even notice what her daughter says. Within her intense sensitivity, Dilsey states: “I’ve seed de first en de last ... I seed de beginning, en now I sees de endin.” (371) Having witnessed the splendor of the Old South, she naturally feels grief about the present state of the once grandiose tradition. Her meaningful reaction to the sermon can be considered as an affirmation of the disintegration of the Compson family. In a broader sense, it clarifies the fact that the downfall of Southern aristocracy is inescapable.

The importance of Dilsey’s presence grows out from her being the only source of stability in the novel. The atmosphere she creates is reminiscent of the notion of permanence. Correspondingly, in the Appendix, the only statement under the title “DILSEY” is, “They endured.” (22) As endurance can be considered an indication of hope, it can be argued that Faulkner implies his desire to revive and universalize the values of Southern aristocracy by placing Dilsey in the last section of the novel. John T. Matthews states: “Dilsey’s faith consoles her with the promise of life beyond time, beyond history.” (Matthews, 1991: 82) Consequently, her broad

perspective to life distinguishes her from the other characters in the novel. Thus, Dilsey becomes Faulkner's only hope to perpetuate the history of his region.

It can be argued that Faulkner dramatizes the positive aspects of his views about the South through Dilsey. However, in view of Faulkner's appreciation, a black woman's being the only hope for the revival of the Old South is in fact an awareness of the hopelessness of the situation. This paradoxical state of the future of the South makes the mood of the last section exceedingly oppressive. This is apparent in the opening of *April Eighth, 1928*: "The day dawned bleak and chill, a moving wall of grey light out of the northeast which, instead of dissolving into moisture, seemed to disintegrate into minute and venomous particles..." (330) The overwhelming atmosphere can be regarded as describing the breakdown of the previously eminent Southern aristocracy, which can be related to the exhaustion of its members who were once as faithful and endurable as Dilsey. Despite her stated attributes which enable her to preserve her moral integrity, Dilsey's being a black servant is what makes her powerless to resurrect the Southern aristocracy. Although Dilsey is presented as a hope, her position within the society is a contradiction to the values and norms of the noble families such as the Compsons or the Sartoris. This is because it is impossible for Faulkner to acknowledge the indispensability of a black woman for the continuity of the Southern history. As a matter of fact, Faulkner appreciates Dilsey's presence only for the progression of the plantation system which once enabled the Southern entrepreneurs to become prosperous. Thus, what Faulkner actually wants to depict through Dilsey's endurance is the importance of slavery for the maintenance of the Southern tradition. Consequently, for Faulkner, Dilsey cannot be considered a savior. She is necessarily present; however, she cannot prevent the tragedy which the South undergoes. She only appears as the representative of an order within the degenerating atmosphere of her environment and she can only exist to perpetuate the system of slavery, which is the basis of the Southern aristocracy. Indeed, the redemption Faulkner envisions for the Southern aristocracy can be regarded as ironic.

It is apparent that Faulkner wishes the salvation of the Old South. However, for the revival of the old values, the hierarchies within the system of slavery have to be replaced. As he is aware of the impossibility of enlivening the past, Faulkner

depicts the history of the South as a myth. Also, he is so devoted to the Southern tradition that he prefers to remain detached from the critique of his own history. Faulkner cannot acknowledge the fact that the previously eminent South desperately needs the help of a black woman. Thus, along with Dilsey, he places everybody beyond the power which is able to resurrect the South. Although Faulkner is aware of the importance of the system of slavery, he does not express his desire of reconstituting the old hierarchies explicitly. On one hand, he wants to give Dilsey a voice; on the other hand, he is unwilling to betray the values of the Southern aristocracy. Faulkner's irresolute state brings about a paradox which he cannot overcome. Aware of his despondency in this matter, he sets in his mythical presentation for the portrayal of such a challenging situation. In this way, he renders the presence of the Old South permanent. Undoubtedly, this permanence is only in memory.

2. The Epitome of the Southern Tragedy:

Absalom, Absalom!

From its place at the center of the Yoknapatawpha chronicle, *Absalom, Absalom!* gains an unsuspected stature; what might in isolation seem a stylized frenzy becomes a tone essentially right, even if all but unbearable. How else, one must concede, could Faulkner manage this lacerating return to the past? how else invest his one great story – the story of the fall of the homeland – with what foaming intensity which might warrant still another recapitulation? (Howe, 1962: 221)

William Faulkner's undeviating devotion to the Southern aristocracy enabled him to acquire a deep sense of history. According to his appreciation, the past is extremely important in that it is the ultimate entity which shapes the present. In other words, it is only possible to apprehend the present by means of a comprehensive evaluation of the past. This fact, in Faulkner's view, clarifies the importance of the objectivity of historical documents. It is well known that history (in particular, Southern history) can be biased depending on the historians' social and intellectual backgrounds. Thus, the documents that they put forward can be regarded as insufficient or deficient. At this point, Faulkner's intention in creating *Absalom, Absalom!*²⁹ becomes significant. His project in his ninth novel is to portray the history of the South in the most objective way possible. Ward L. Miner describes Faulkner's objectives in this way:

It is a commonplace of historical criticism to say that there is no such thing as entirely objective history... There are always, in spite of sought-for impartiality, implied judgments. Faulkner is not writing a historical account of Yoknapatawpha county, but a critique of its history. Unlike most historians, he is not trying to avoid judging his county; rather he is constantly seeking new vantage points from which to judge it. To judge implies standards for judgment. What are Faulkner's? Almost always moral standards... (Miner, 1952: 131, 132)

²⁹ The title of the novel is from the story of King David and his son Absalom in the Book of Samuel. Absalom takes place in a revolt against his father. He is killed by the King's general, and the only thing the King can do is lament by uttering the name of his son. Themes such as fighting against the dynasty of the father and incestuous desire are the salient parallelisms between this story from the Old Testament and the novel.

Apparently, the 'new vantage points from which to judge' the Old South are relevant with Faulkner's keen notion of morality that is based upon his familial history. In his critique of the Southern aristocracy, he presents a general view of the moral values he has inherited throughout his life. Nevertheless, he does this in such perfection that it is impossible for the reader to miss the connections between the sense of history and morality. Ward L. Miner goes on his description as such:

It might be said that Faulkner uses his historical sense as a means of making his moral critique. Or again, the moral critique is used as means of making real the historical sense. Both statements are true and yet not true, because for Faulkner the two have become one and the same thing – his historical sense is a moral sense. To find out the nature of Faulkner's historical sense, we must examine the moral sense as revealed by his moral critique of Yoknapatawpha county. (Miner, 1952: 132)

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner employs multiple apprehensions of morality in order to maintain the objectivity of the story. He does this by employing different narrators who experience the Southern tragedy in person. As the social and familial roots of these characters vary considerably, the reader is able to grasp the essence of the Southern history in a broader perspective. S/he is able to sympathize with each of the characters because it is possible to overlook the story from different standpoints. Moreover, in this way, Faulkner shows the fact that what is left unspoken by a character can play a crucial role in the credibility of the story. Consequently, history can change remarkably depending upon who is telling it.

The history of the Southern aristocracy starts with its first settlers' goal of acquiring fertile land through the easiest and cheapest way. The exploitation of the land which belonged to Native Americans was the most popular means of doing this. Later on, they built their cotton plantations and prospered in a short time because the system of slavery served in the best way for the satisfaction of the landowners. However, the extravagant life style and slave abuse drifted the Southern aristocrats into a process of moral degeneration. Robert Coughlan illustrates the parvenus of the Old South as follows:

...by the time of the Civil War, the pattern of the plantation aristocracy was in full bloom. The young, rough pioneers had become landed barons in great houses and felt the need to surround themselves with evidences of that culture which few had had time or opportunity to acquire before. The houses grew ornate inside and out, with fine furnishings brought from New Orleans,

New York³⁰, and abroad; the library shelves displayed Shakespeare and the standard classics; there were gilded harps and finely carved and inlaid pianos in the music rooms, where wives and daughters cultivated this among other refined arts, such as china painting, in a rapid accretion of gentility, until the whole society had become highly mannered and a chivalric tradition had grown up... (Coughlan, 1954: 83, 84)

In time, the 'highly mannered' members of the Southern aristocracy were so detached from the common people that they lost their sense of judgment. Their lack of benevolence caused them to display inhuman acts. They tortured, raped and persecuted the slaves without feeling guilt or pity. The power of wealth and the insensitivity it evoked caused the aristocrats also to look down upon the poor white man. They were given jobs in the plantations and they lived under harsh conditions. Although they were not treated as cruelly as the black slaves, they were not supposed to violate the hierarchies in daily life. They were not allowed to approach the front doors or enter the mansions of the landowners. Indeed, the only apparent difference between the poor white man and the black slave was the freedom of the former.

Some of the poor whites who were able to get out of the command of the rich ones benefited from the advantage of being able to establish their own plantations. They acquired land mainly through illegal means, and became prosperous in the same way with their previous landowners. Still, the social and intellectual backgrounds of these people did not suit the manners of the Southern aristocracy. Nevertheless, their improper attitude did not cause them to be isolated from the community because wealth was the only measure of acquiring notability. This brought the inevitable result of the ethical downfall of the South. Moreover, the defeat of the Civil War and the outlaw of slavery resulted in the region's loss of economic power. The South's economy remained passive while the North was in a constant improvement with its industry. Recovery was impossible for the South in terms of both morality and finance. Robert Coughlan's following statements clarify the reasons of the exhaustion of the Southern grandiosity:

Why was this [downfall of the South]? Defeated peoples have risen again to virility, sometimes to excesses of it. Perhaps the reason lay partly in the contemporary, almost universal outmoding of the aristocratic and the genteel

³⁰ These cities were regarded as the most sophisticated and exotic ones in the period of the Southern aristocracy.

tradition which comprised the social mores of the class of leaders, and to which their descendants clung out of sentiment and pride. Doubtless it lay partly in the gradual depletion of the land itself, victimized by corn and cotton until opportunity had been washed away in the gullies. And partly in the overpowering growth of finance and industry in the North and West, draining off both capital and human initiative, and creating a mental climate of lethargy simply by invidious comparison. It lay in all the various, inexact, and in part unconscious reasons why a society fails in its response and begins the slow retrograde process. (Coughlan, 1954: 87, 88)

Absalom, Absalom! designates all of the characteristics of the South in relation to the notions of history and tragedy. It is based upon the story of Thomas Sutpen, a poor white man whose only ambition is to establish an eminent dynasty, which he calls his 'design,' so that he can display his power and become a respectable man by acquiring a place among the members of the Southern aristocracy. However, he becomes obsessed by the perfection of his 'design' and becomes almost an inhuman man, showing no affection or concern for his family. As a matter of fact, his marriage to the daughter of an honorable man, and his children are part of his 'design.' His son, Henry, is his only hope for the perpetuation of his project. However, a crucial mistake that Sutpen had made in the past results in the destruction of his previously grandiose dynasty.

What is remarkable about the novel is that there are three characters that the readers of *The Sound and the Fury* are already acquainted with: Jason Compson (III), his son Quentin Compson, and Shreve, Quentin's roommate at Harvard. They appear as the most important narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* The reader is able to grasp their personalities in detail, and notice that their commentaries are the outcomes of their perspectives to life. This becomes significant especially in Quentin's narration. As stated in the previous chapter which is about *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin is unable to reconcile with the moral degradation of the South, and eventually drowns himself in Charles River. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the reader is able to see the fact that his motives for suicide have become more effective.

The novel can be regarded as constituting of two different layers. The first one is structured upon the story of Quentin Compson of 1909, which is the present year of the novel. Quentin, Shreve, and Mr. Compson comment upon the story of Thomas Sutpen's degradation in terms of morality and status, before and after the Civil War. Their commentaries constitute the second layer, which takes place

between the years 1807 and 1884. On a hot September day in 1909, Quentin receives an invitation from Miss Rosa, the sister of Sutpen's wife, and he begins listening to her version of Sutpen's story. Later on, she wants to take him to Sutpen's plantation to show him something which the reader does not learn until the end of the novel. In the mean time, Quentin has shared Miss Rosa's version of Sutpen's story with his father. Mr. Compson, with his incomplete information, comments upon the story and makes further explanations. The reader learns the details of Sutpen's childhood, and his reasons for becoming an exceedingly ambitious man. It is clear that Mr. Compson's account of the story is not satisfactory. Later on, the present day of the novel skips forward to January 1910, which is five months before Quentin's suicide. In their room at Harvard, Quentin tells Shreve the story of Sutpen, and they try to make a re-evaluation through conjectures. Although their opinions are highly credible, they cannot be accepted as confirmable facts about the downfall of Sutpen's dynasty.

It is clear that the reader of *Absalom, Absalom!* should make a synthesis of the information s/he is presented, and make his/her version of the story because the details which are not known or ignored by a narrator can be presented by another one. Thus, in Faulkner's view, historical facts cannot be presented objectively, and in absolute correctness.

2.1. A Legacy of Moral Degradation: The Sutpen Saga

William Faulkner's depiction of Thomas Sutpen's 'design' can be regarded as a precise account of the destruction of the Old South. Sutpen's story of ethical degeneration is based upon the issues of slavery, racism, and incest. Faulkner's intention is to clarify the fact that because of its sins, it is impossible for the South to be resurrected. This can also be accepted as the curse of the region, and the penalty of the system of slavery. Hence, it is obvious that Faulkner is aware of the dishonor of the South, and his endeavor is to render a comprehensive account of the dishonorable reputation of his hometown. He makes his presentation through the story of a character, Thomas Sutpen that epitomizes all of the admirable and unfavorable features of the South. In this way, Faulkner is able to praise and criticize the South simultaneously.

Thomas Sutpen's passionate and resolute nature about establishing a glorious dynasty is in fact the consequence of a single event he had come across when he was fourteen years old. Sutpen was born in the West Virginia mountains, "where what few other people he knew lived in log cabins boiling with children like the one he was born in... where the only colored people were Indians and you only looked down on them with your rifle sights³¹..." (*Absalom, Absalom!* 221) Thomas and the people around him did not know the concept of 'property,' because in the mountains, a man could live anywhere he wanted. He "had never even heard of, never imagined, a place, a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them..." (221) Thomas was also unaware of the system of slavery because "he didn't even know there was a country all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own, and where a certain few men not only had the power of life and death and barter and sale over others, but they had living human men to perform the endless repetitive personal offices, such as pouring the very whiskey from the jug and putting the glass into a man's hand or pulling off his boots for him to go to bed..." (221, 222)

³¹ All quotations are taken from the 1964 version of *Absalom, Absalom!* which is published by Random House, Inc.

The first time Thomas encounters the notion of ‘property,’ and the system of slavery is at the plantation where his father works for a rich landowner. The new concepts that he learns on this plantation can be regarded as “his ordeal of social initiation,” in which he experiences the incident that changes his life. (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 298) One day, his father wants Thomas to deliver a note to the landowner. Without even being aware of what kind of a relationship his father and this rich man have, he goes to the front door of the mansion and knocks on the door. The ‘nigger’ butler opens the door, and without giving Thomas a chance to tell what he had come for, he tells the boy “never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back.” (232) It takes time for Thomas to understand what this means because he “had sprung from a people whose houses didn’t have back doors but only windows and anyone entering or leaving by a window would be either hiding or escaping, neither of which he was doing.” (233) Evidently, it is Thomas’ innocence which causes him to experience such a disillusionment. As a consequence, he decides to defy the humiliation he faced with, and becomes obsessed by the idea of creating a ‘design,’ which he eventually succeeds in realizing. “So to combat them,” Thomas had to own “land and niggers and a fine house...” (238) Faulkner’s commentary on Sutpen’s feelings in this matter is as such:

He [Sutpen] wanted revenge as he saw it, but also he wanted to establish the fact that man is immortal, that man, if he is man, cannot be inferior to another through artificial standards or circumstances. What he was trying to do – when he was a boy, he had gone to the front door of a big house and somebody, a servant, said, Go around the back door. He [Sutpen] said, I’m going to be the one that lives in the big house, I’m going to establish a dynasty, I don’t care how, and he violated all the rules of decency and honor and pity and compassion, and the fates took revenge on him. That’s what the story was. But he was trying to say in his blundering way that, why should a man be better than me because he’s richer than me, that if I had the chance I might be just as good as he thinks he is by getting the same outward trappings which he has, which was a big house and servants in it. He didn’t say, I’m going to be braver or more compassionate or more honest than he – he just said, I’m going to be as rich as he was, as big as he was on the outside... (Karl, 1989: 549)

Sutpen is a man who lacks contemplation; consequently, he acts upon intuition. No matter how, his ultimate desire is to become ‘as rich as’ the plantation owner for whose mansion he was not allowed to approach. Ignoring all of the moral values that a man should possess, he immediately sets off for the West Indies, where he had

learned at school that shrewd and brave men could become extremely rich. He believes that he is brave, and that shrewdness can “be learned by energy and will in the school of endeavor and experience...” (242) Thomas becomes an overseer at a plantation in Haiti, and gets married to the daughter of the French landowner. They have a son, and after a short time, Sutpen learns that his wife is part black. As he is profoundly devoted to his ‘design’, it is impossible for Sutpen to acknowledge the fact that he has a black son because it is impossible for a ‘nigger’ to become the heir of his dynasty. At this point, Sutpen’s contempt of the black people should be clarified: his despising of the black race is not a result of his strict racism. It is a consequence of the severe discrimination of races, which is the salient attribute of the Southern aristocracy. Melvin Backman defines the tragedy of the black slaves through the Southern racism and the system of slavery as follows:

In the Old South the Negro slave had generally no father and little mother. Under a system that made human beings into chattels, the Negro woman, when she did not labor in the fields, served as the breeder of stock and as the instrument for the white man’s pleasure. The Negress was a kind of mare, the Negro a stud... Reality was two families by the planter, white and black. Reality was a brother who was not a brother, a sister who was not a sister, a wife who was not a wife. Southerners knew of this reality, accepted it, lived with it, even though it violated what they thought they believed in: honor, pride, the family, and the decencies of life. This reality underlies the house of Sutpen. (Backman, 1966: 105, 106)

As his ultimate desire is to acquire a respectful position in such a community, Sutpen has to obey its rules in every way. Indeed, he abandons his family by supplying them enough money. However, as implied in the above quotation, his half black son, Charles Bon³², will appear as the destructive force upon the dynasty which Sutpen establishes. Sutpen’s discrimination of races and his disregard of moral values are indications of his tragic doom. In the following quotation, Richard P. Adams describes Sutpen’s inability of becoming an honorable man, and his failure to perpetuate his line:

Sutpen... is prevented by his innocence from learning anything about the actual concrete relations that operate in a complex society, or in a family that belongs to such a society. All he can take in to shape a morality and a conscience with is an abstract and therefore static “design” – the word is well

³² The name ‘Bon’ comes from the French word which means ‘good.’

chosen – which then defines his character and identity. It is a monomania which enables him to become... a rich plantation owner, the very pattern (in a sharply ironic sense) of the aristocrat, but which will never let him become a man, with human feelings, human virtues, and a human capability for the continual compromises imposed by human inconsistency, weakness, and error. Because he is unwilling or unable to bend, his doom in Faulkner's dynamic world is to be broken by the ubiquitous winds and floods of change. (Adams, 1968: 190)

In the Old South, acquiring the respect of the community was only possible by being the member of an honorable family. Although people valued money, nobility was the most important factor in becoming a member of the Southern aristocracy. Correspondingly, the townsfolk of Jefferson attend Sutpen's gambling, and hunting parties, and drink with him; however, they never acknowledge his lack of moral values, and he is never respected as a gentleman. Cleanth Brooks describes this hypocritical attitude of the Southern community as follows:

The society into which Sutpen rides in 1833 is not a secularized society. That is not to say that the people are necessarily "good." They have their selfishness and cruelty and their snobbery, as men have always had them. Once Sutpen has acquired enough wealth and displayed enough force, the people of the community are willing to accept him. But they do not live by his code, nor do they share his innocent disregard of accepted values. Indeed, from the beginning they regard him with deep suspicion and some consternation. These suspicions are gradually mollified; there is a kind of acceptance; but... Sutpen had only one friend, Quentin's grandfather, General Compson, and this in spite of the fact that the society of the lower South in the nineteenth century was rather fluid and that class lines were flexible. Men did rise in one generation from log cabins to great landed estates. But the past was important, blood was important, and Southern society thought of itself as traditional. (Brooks, 1963: 297)

In order to fit the "traditional" Southern society, Sutpen clings onto the honorable General Compson, his only friend who has given him the first cotton seed for the new established 'Sutpen's Hundred.'³³ Sutpen's intimacy with a notable figure is not a coincidence. Moreover, to strengthen the authority of his 'design,' he gets married to Ellen Coldfield, who is the daughter of a respectable merchant, Goodhue Coldfield. However, Sutpen had "come to town to find a wife exactly as he would

³³ Sutpen buys a hundred square miles of the best virgin land in Jefferson, by making a crooked deal with the Chickasaw Indian agent, in return for a Spanish coin. He establishes his plantation with the toil of his savage slaves, and his abuse of a French architect that he had kidnapped. His plantation is to be called 'Sutpen's Hundred' for the next seventy years, until its destruction.

have gone to the Memphis market to buy livestock or slaves.” (42) Nobody in the town of Jefferson can understand how a morally debased man such as Sutpen could convince an honest and wise Puritan such as Goodhue Coldfield. Moreover, Sutpen convinces his father-in-law to be involved in a shady financial deal.

Mr. Coldfield is “a man with a name of absolute and undeviating and even Puritan uprightness in a country and time of lawless opportunity...” (43) Consequently, the deal he makes with Sutpen makes it impossible for him to be at peace with his conscience. His acting out of the frame of his long-established moral values, and his approval of his daughter’s marriage to the vulgar man who has ruined his peaceful life drifts Mr. Coldfield into an endless despair, which becomes deeper with the break out of the Civil War. As a result of his keen notion of morality, Mr. Coldfield is aware of the sins of the South. The following quotation portrays Mr. Coldfield’s state of mind after he sees that the deal he has made with Sutpen has begun to work:

...Mr Coldfield never did believe it [the deal] would work, so when he saw that it...had worked it was his conscience he hated, not Sutpen – his conscience and the land, the country which had created his conscience and then offered the opportunity to have made all that money to the conscience which it had created, which could do nothing but decline; hated that country so much that he was even glad when he saw it drifting closer and closer to a doomed and fatal war... and so he would not be present on that day when the South would realize that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sand of opportunism and moral brigandage. (260)

In order not to defend the system of slavery, Mr. Coldfield rejects to fight in the Confederate army by nailing himself into the attic of his house. Ignoring the morally debased state of the South, he starves himself to death. Indeed, it can be argued that it is inconceivable for the noble Southern man to acquiesce to the corruption of the ethical values that he is profoundly devoted to.

As opposed to Mr. Coldfield, his elder daughter, Ellen, appears as an inert and feeble figure who takes pride in being married to a rich man, despite his disrespectful state in the community. Having forgotten her wedding day on which she “quitted home and kin on a flood of tears,” she shows off by displaying her extravagance in town. (69) The most important event which depicts Ellen’s weak and unwise nature is the request that she makes to her sister Rosa, who is about twenty

years younger than herself. Although Rosa is nearly six years younger than her nieces, Ellen asks her to protect them from the brutality of their father. In response, Rosa states: "He has already given them life: he does not need to harm them further. It is from themselves that they need protection." (22) As a consequence, because of her ineffectual nature as a mother and wife, it is apparent that Ellen is unable to cope with her husband's ruinous will and immorality.

The destructive effects of Sutpen's indomitable willfulness can be observed through the way he spoils the lives of his children. It is evident that his perpetuation of his line depends upon the presence of his having strong-willed children, especially a son. However, his son Henry does not appear as a figure that has the necessary resolution and fierceness to continue the dynasty that his father has set up. This becomes clear at the scene in which Ellen sees Sutpen "fighting, naked, fighting not as white men fight, with rules and weapons, but as negroes fight to hurt one another quick and bad..." (29) In this scene, what is more terrifying than Sutpen's violence is that he makes Henry watch this wild fight, disregarding the fact that he is only a child. Henry's reaction is completely the opposite of what Sutpen expects from him. He keeps "screaming and vomiting," rejecting to look at the bloody faces of his father and the wild Negroes. (29) Ironically, it is Judith who has acquired her father's temperament. In contrast to Henry, Judith has been watching the violence of her father secretly, in quite an impressed manner. This can be regarded as foreshadowing her becoming "a woman of courage and of iron endurance" during the catastrophes she is to face with in the following years. (Brooks, 1983: 201) However, Judith's strong-willed nature does not serve for the perpetuation of the grandeur of Sutpen's Hundred. Despite the vicious temperament that she has acquired through her father, she will act against his desire of keeping the black people away from his 'design,' and she will remain indifferent to his disapproval of miscegenation. The way Judith acts during and after the Civil War depicts the radical changes of the norms which the Southern aristocracy is based upon. Definitely, these changes hint at the exhaustion of the moral center of the Old South.

The major conflict in *Absalom, Absalom!* is directly related to the degeneration of the ethical values of the South: the unexpected presence of Sutpen's first son, Charles Bon, at the peak of the splendor of Sutpen's 'design.' Sutpen had

repudiated Bon because of his trace of black blood. As a result of this, Bon was raised by his mother in New Orleans. He reflected the sophisticated and esoteric nature of this city both physically and spiritually. He was “a young man of worldly elegance and assurance beyond his years, handsome, apparently wealthy...” (75) At the age of twenty-eight, Bon decides to go to the University of Mississippi, in the same year with his half-brother Henry. Bon and Henry become close friends upon the latter’s lack of knowledge of their familial relationship. Henry is absolutely fascinated by Bon’s sophistication. In his letters to Judith, he writes about Bon in such a way that it is as if Henry himself is the one who is in love with Bon³⁴. Henry’s passion for Bon makes Judith fall in love with her half-brother without even seeing him. Thus, “...it was Henry who seduced Judith: not Bon...” (97) Henry brings Bon to Sutpen’s Hundred for the Christmas holiday, and Sutpen sees that he cannot escape from the sin he had committed in the past. However, Bon did not intend to have a destructive effect upon Sutpen’s ‘design.’ “He wanted no inheritance; he wanted but a word, a sign, a look, a touch from Sutpen which would say you are my son. He got no acknowledgement, he got nothing.” (Backman, 1966: 104) Upon his father’s indifference, Bon becomes motivated to marry his half-sister.

In the Old South, the concept of miscegenation was unacceptable. In order to maintain the hierarchies within the community, it was strictly forbidden for black and white races to have affairs in close proximity. Ilse D. Lind states: “...where caste rules prevail, affection and intimate relationships between “whites” and those of “tainted” blood cannot be recognized or sanctioned.” (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 295) These strict views about the concept of miscegenation set forth an ironical aspect of the issue of racism. The people who do not know the fact that Bon is part black are delighted in his presence because of his sophistication. Consequently, they regard him as the perfect man for Judith to get married to. Nevertheless, for the people who are aware of the intolerable fact about him, Bon is a serious threat for the continuation of the purity and nobility of the white gentlewoman. This ironical situation is evident in Melvin Backman’s following statements:

³⁴ Faulkner’s presentation of Henry’s admiration of Bon has homosexual connotations.

The Story of Charles Bon is a richly ironic fable of the Old South. Bon embodies both the most favored of whites, a New Orleans scion, and the lowliest of blacks, the white man's bastard. He is the intelligent, cultivated young gentleman who...signifies a subhuman threat to white womanhood. (Backman, 1966: 105)

Sutpen has two choices: he either has to acknowledge Bon as his son, or he has to remain silent and disregard the fact that his children are committing both incest and miscegenation. Surprisingly, Sutpen does neither. In either case, he was to witness the corruption of his 'design' through the violation of the rules which were crucial for the Southern aristocracy. Sutpen's merciless solution for this conflict will prove to have a destructive effect upon both his dynasty, and his family.

The issues which are recurrent in the tragedy of the Southern history are fratricide and incest. Correspondingly, "the triangular relationship of Henry and Judith Sutpen and Charles Bon..." can be regarded as a salient instance of this situation. (Gray, 1996: 204) In order to protect his 'design' from being corrupted, Sutpen has to prevent the marriage of Bon and Judith. He tells Henry that Bon cannot marry Judith because he is their half brother. Upon learning this fact, Henry immediately renounces his birthright, and goes to fight in the Civil War with Bon. During the four years of despair and suffering, Henry is in an effort to reconcile with the idea of committing incest by trying to justify it through the relationships of the kings and dukes of the past. During the war, Sutpen arranges a meeting with Henry. Aware of the impossibility of Henry's acknowledgement of a brother who is 'tainted' with black blood, Sutpen renders his son "compelled to an agonizing decision" by telling him the shocking fact about Bon. (Brooks, 1963: 319) The war ends, and on the wedding day of Judith and Bon, Henry kills his brother at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred. Thus, it becomes clear that "*it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which... [Henry] cant bear.*" (356) Moreover, Bon triggers Henry's motivation for murder. He states: "*I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry*"³⁵. (358) Upon murdering Bon, Henry runs away. Thus, it becomes impossible for Sutpen to perpetuate his name. Faulkner regards Thomas Sutpen as a man "who wanted a son through pride, and got too many of them and they destroyed

³⁵ This statement is from Quentin and Shreve's re-interpretation of Sutpen's story through conjectures.

him.” (Gray, 1996: 204) Indeed, fratricide becomes one of the major issues which play an important role in the tragic downfall of the Southern aristocracy in terms of its moral integrity.

Throughout the narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Judith appears as the only figure who displays innumerable acts of courage as a consequence of her indomitable endurance. The way she handles the disastrous results of the war and her cold blooded reaction to the death of the man she loves make her appear as the strong gentlewoman who is able to overcome every kind of catastrophe. During the war, she succeeds in surviving with the help of her mulatto sister, Clytie,³⁶ despite the threat of hunger, and the unsafe conditions under which they live. As there are no slaves to work in the fields, she learns how to plough like a man, and manages to maintain her perseverance. She has to “learn to tend household without money or servants, to harness the mule, and go clad in faded gingham.” (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 303) When her father returns home shortly after Henry has fled, she encourages him in every way in order to make a third start for the perpetuation of his ‘design.’ She condones his mistreatment of her aunt Rosa, and Milly, the granddaughter of the poor squatter who serves them for long years. Now that Sutpen has lost both of his sons, he needs a new one for the continuation of his dynasty. In this respect, he makes Rosa a disgraceful offer after proposing her: they should have a child first, and they can get married if the baby is a boy. Rosa abandons Sutpen’s Hundred immediately, and does not go there for about forty years. Later on, Sutpen, despite his old age, starts having a relationship with Milly Jones, who is only fifteen years old. Judith treats Milly warmly by giving her a new dress, and she supports her father, once more. In the mean time, Sutpen has acknowledged the fact that it is impossible for him to revive his plantation. He has sold a great amount of his land, and has opened a store which sells cheap goods to poor whites, with the partnership of Wash Jones, Milly’s grandfather. Indeed, Milly gives birth to a baby girl on the same day as the foal of Sutpen’s mare. Sutpen states: “Well, Milly; too bad you’re

³⁶ Clytie is the short version of Clytemnestra. She is Thomas Sutpen’s daughter from a slave that he had bought in the years he had started setting up his plantation. Sutpen knew that he could not get married until he had set up his plantation. Because of this, he bought to woman slaves in order to satisfy his sexual desire, and one of them is the mother of Clytemnestra.

not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable.” (286) Hearing these shocking words, Wash Jones, kills Sutpen violently, with a rusty scythe.

Although Judith’s support to her father appears as an effectual attitude in the maintenance of her father’s dynasty, the way she leads her life after his death prove to be opposing to the strict rules of his ‘design.’ Her inviting Charles Bon’s octoroon³⁷ mistress to his grave, and her death of yellow fever while nursing the half black son of Charles Bon can be regarded as a proof of her deviation from the established standards of a Southern gentlewoman. According to Cleanth Brooks, the way Judith acts after her father’s death can be considered the same with Henry’s renunciation of his birthright:

If it is too much to call Henry’s course of action renunciation and expiation, there is full justification for calling Judith’s action just that. Judith has much of her father in her, but she is a woman, and she also has love... It is Judith who invites Charles Bon’s octoroon mistress to visit Bon’s grave. It is Judith who, on his mother’s death, sends to New Orleans for Bon’s son and tries to rear him. Some years later she also tries to free him (as Quentin conjectures) by promising to take care of his Negro wife and child if he will go to the North to pass as white, and Quentin imagines her saying to him: “Call me Aunt Judith, Charles” (p. 208). But Quentin’s conjectures aside, we know that Judith did take him into the house when he was stricken with yellow fever, and that she died nursing him. The acknowledgement of blood kinship is made; Sutpen’s design is repudiated; the boy, even though he has the “taint” of Negro blood, is not turned away from the door. (Brooks, 1963: 304)

It is evident that Sutpen’s lack of a moral center proves to have a destructive effect upon his ‘design.’ Apparently, he has “set his children to destroying one another” in order to cover a mistake which he had done in the past. (181) In other words, Richard P. Adams states: “The effect of Sutpen’s design is that it destroys his sons, and thereby, for him, the future.” (Adams, 1968: 191) No matter how hard he works for the permanence of Sutpen’s Hundred, it is impossible for him to maintain the integrity of his dynasty because he does not act within the proper sense of tradition. Rather than setting his plantation up upon ‘stern morality,’ he prefers to build his design according to his own immoral appreciation. Cleanth Brooks defines Sutpen’s understanding of the concept of tradition as follows:

³⁷ An octoroon is a person whose ancestry is one-eighth Black. It is acceptable for men to be sexually related with such women; however, they do not get married with them.

...Sutpen's manners indicate his abstract approach to the whole matter of living. Sutpen would seize upon "the traditional" as a pure abstraction – which, of course, is to deny its very meaning. For him the tradition is not a way of life "handed down" or "transmitted" from the community, past and present, to the individual nurtured by it. It is an assortment of things to be possessed, not a manner of living that embodies certain values and determines men's conduct. (Brooks, 1963: 298)

Because of his apprehension of tradition as a concept which can be acquired through the practice of certain measures, Sutpen fails to continue his line, and loses everything he has. The breakdown of Sutpen's 'design' is in direct relation with his devaluation of the concepts of ancestry and history. Cleanth Brooks makes a further portrayal of Sutpen's indecent and corrupt manner in his following statements:

He [Sutpen] has no pride in ancestry and no concerns for his place of origin. He glories...in the fact that he is truly a self-made man. He is completely oriented toward the future. He lives for the great design he has devised. He is a man of blueprints and schedules. Nothing must be allowed to get in the way of the completion of his plans, not even his children, whom finally he regards principally as instruments for fulfilling the design. Love, compassion, human sympathy, do not concern him. His virtues are courage and justice, at least as he defines justice. But salient above all in his mentality is a terrible rigidity. The design must be completed as planned; no exceptions, no modifications, no alterations are to be allowed. His downfall occurs because of his rigidity. ..Thomas Sutpen was an awesome figure and he had virtues, but his very virtues were dangerous. (Brooks, 1983: 223)

It can be argued that Sutpen's initial success in carrying his plantation to its peak was undoubtedly momentary. As stated formerly, Sutpen planned his 'design' upon the black servant's ordering him away the front door of the mansion, when he was a child. From that day on, his ultimate desire was to be rich enough to own servants who would order the poor people away in the same way. However, on the day which Bon appeared at his door, there was "no monkey-dressed nigger anywhere under the sun to come to the door and order the child away..." (267) It is clear that Sutpen's 'design' fails to serve for the sole purpose it had been created.

A further point which is significant in the tragic story of Sutpen is his antiheroic³⁸ and dishonorable death at the hands of Wash Jones. It is noteworthy that Wash is the same kind of a man as Sutpen: he is a poor white squatter, just like

³⁸ Sutpen had a heroic and respectable profile after he became a colonel due to his success in the Civil War.

Sutpen's father. Therefore, their life styles and social backgrounds can be considered to be identical. Wash appears as a loyal and decent servant who admires Sutpen and has great confidence in him. He is aware of the relationship of his granddaughter and Sutpen. Nevertheless, the following statements of Wash Jones designate his respect to Sutpen:

If you was arra other man, I'd say you was as old as me. And old or no old, I wouldn't let her [Milly] keep that dress [which Judith had given as a present] nor nothing else that come from your hand. But you are different...And I know that whatever your hands tech, whether hit's a regiment of men or a ignorant gal or just a hound dog, that you will make hit right. (284)

Until Sutpen's economic collapse, Jones was not allowed to enter the house. He was only allowed to deliver the vegetables and the fish he had hunted at the back door. Thus, it is ironic that Sutpen ends up in almost the same financial state as Jones. His becoming a partner with the squatter on his plantation, and his drinking and spending time with him depict his unexpected downfall, and the exhaustion of his 'design.' Moreover, it is clear that Sutpen has fallen to the same state of poverty while he was living with his family. Now that he has become a poor man, his death at the hands of a man who is his kind becomes meaningful. What is also noteworthy about his death is that Sutpen himself had given Wash the scythe with which he is murdered. Indeed, Faulkner implies his view about the impossibility of changing the hereditary feature of poverty and the lack of aristocratic origin. Once the white Southern man is born poor, the efforts to become a member of the Southern aristocracy are completely futile. One can never acquire the essence of true aristocracy apart from his/her ancestry.

Evidently, Faulkner proves his apprehension of the past as the ultimate determiner of the present through a comprehensive analysis of the way Sutpen acts, and the choices he makes. Undoubtedly, Sutpen himself caused the destruction of his dynasty by making an incurable mistake. His repudiation of his half black son appears as the major reason which results in the disintegration of his 'design.' Additionally, his social status at the time of his death is a reminiscent of his life before he became a rich plantation owner. The crucial point is that Sutpen never appears as a man of unshakeable moral principles. He is able to perform every kind of inhuman and immoral act in order to obtain what he wants. Indeed, it is clear that

Sutpen's disgraceful past has a considerable effect upon the formation of his undesirable present. He can never escape from the sins he has committed. He is haunted by his curse and his story becomes a tragedy.

The extensive portrayal of the moral degeneration in *Absalom, Absalom!* can also be related to the fatal flaws of the Southern community. This is evident in Ilse D. Lind's following statements:

Broadly stated, the intention of *Absalom, Absalom!* is to create...a grand tragic vision of historic dimension. As in the tragedies of the ancients and in the great myths of the Old Testament, the actions represent the issues of timeless moral significance. That Faulkner here links the decline of a social order to an infraction of morality cannot be doubted. Sutpen falls through innate deficiency of moral insight, but the error which he commits is also socially derived and thus illustrates the flaw which dooms with equal finality the aspirations of a whole culture. (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 278)

The 'flaw' which drifts 'a whole culture' into a tragic doom is principally the unfeeling nature of the Southern aristocrats. According to Miss Rosa, the exhaustion of Southern aristocracy is a result of the South's harsh defeat in the Civil War, and God let the South lose the war because of the "men with valor and strength but without pity or honor." (20) The continuation of the system of slavery necessitated the continuation of the lack of kindness and humanity. Ilse D. Lind makes a further analysis of the Sutpen saga as follows:

The Sutpen tragedy is the means of conveying the larger social tragedy. In its broader outlines, the Sutpen tragedy is in many ways analogous to the social. Sutpen had two sons: one white, the other Negro. He denied the Negro; fratricide resulted. The Civil War, too, was a fratricidal conflict caused by denial of the Negro...

Sutpen's sin, his failure of humanity, is the equivalent in personal terms of the sin of plantation culture, its failure to accept the brotherhood of all mankind...

The social tragedy is conveyed through the Sutpen tragedy concretely as well as abstractly. As the biggest single plantation owner in the county, Sutpen is the very incarnation of the Old South. In describing the conception, attainment, and destruction of Sutpen's design, Faulkner shows the tragedy of that society in terms of the presiding theme. (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 300)

Faulkner depicts the corrupted nature of Sutpen in such a detached and objective manner that he enables the reader to sympathize with this inhuman man. He depicts the impositions of the Southern community upon its members and

clarifies the fact that the desire of acquiring a position in the Old South necessitated harsh sacrifices. Correspondingly, Faulkner explicates Sutpen's motives for becoming a man of indomitable will. The reader becomes more likely to understand Sutpen's state of mind in relation with the 'socially derived' causes which play an important role in the formation of his monomania about setting up a dynasty.

One of the most important figures who represent 'the very incarnation of the Old South' is Miss Rosa, Sutpen's sister in law. Rosa appears as the Southern gentlewoman who has internalized all of the established moral conducts: purity, chastity, and virtue. As she is the daughter of a Methodist steward, she grows up in an environment in which such concepts are regarded as crucial. The tragedy of Rosa is about the ruination of her life because of the burdens she has to face with until her death. Rosa hates her father because she believes that he is responsible for the death of her mother. During the war, she has to hide this man whom she hates in the attic for years. After his death, she becomes a pauper, and has to steal food from the gardens of her neighbors because she is too proud to accept any charity. Moreover, Sutpen insults her by suggesting that they should first have a child, and get married if the baby is a boy. Upon this horrible offer, Rosa abandons Sutpen's Hundred for forty-three years. She regards Sutpen as responsible for the catastrophes she witnesses throughout her life. In Rosa's view, Sutpen is the cause of every single disaster which plays a role in the tragic doom of his family, and in a broader sense, the Old South.

In the year 1909, Miss Rosa and her mulatto sister Clytie are the remaining figures who have witnessed the brutality and tragedy of Sutpen, and the Old South. Although the relationship of these two women appears in the background of the story of Sutpen, it is noteworthy in that it epitomizes the pretentious manners of Rosa as a Southern gentlewoman, and the loyal and guiltless Negro who appears as the victim of the system of slavery. Ilse D. Lind describes Rosa's mistreatment of Clytie in this way:

From the atmosphere of cold abstraction and proud near-poverty in which she was raised, Miss Rosa derives not only her distorted view of life, but the social pretentiousness of a would-be aristocrat. Her repeated assertions that Sutpen "wasn't even a gentleman," and her claim that "the Coldfields are qualified to reciprocate whatever particularly signal honor

marriage with anyone might confer on them,” betray her actual social position. Her prejudices against Negroes are intensified by her repressions and by her need to sustain a false sense of social superiority. In youth, she refused to touch the objects with which Clytie had come in contact; at one point in the story, the shock of physical contact with Sutpen’s Negro daughter sickens her with revulsion. Time does not lessen her snobbery of her prejudices; it merely fixes them into reflexes. The form of address she employs to the last of Sutpen’s enfeebled kin: “You nigger...You ain’t any Sutpen,” reveals that even as late as 1913 there was no end in sight of the vicious continuum of Negro-white tension. (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 285)

It is ironic that although Rosa does not regard Sutpen as a gentleman and belittles him because of his former poverty, she displays her contempt of Clytie by mentioning Sutpen’s name as if it is praiseworthy and honorable. Once more, it becomes apparent that the hierarchies within the Southern community are unshakeable. Despite her guiltless state, Clytie takes the first place in being the object of hatred. What makes Sutpen more advantageous is his skin color. Once a man is born white, he can never fall into the status of the dehumanized Negro. As a result, within the norms of the Southern aristocracy, Sutpen’s skin color can be accepted as a means for the justification of his immorality and brutality.

As a victim of the system of slavery, Clytie appears as the most silent figure in *Absalom, Absalom!* She “represents the Negro family servant so involved with her white folks that she could make no life of her own.” (Backman, 1966: 109) Although Clytie is the only character who witnesses the rise and fall of Sutpen’s Hundred in detail, she does not give a voice to the tragedy she experiences. However, Clytie does not remain passive; rather than speaking, she displays her reaction through a courageous act of setting the house on fire. In September 1909, when Sutpen’s Hundred is in ruins, Rosa finds out that Clytie has been hiding Henry for the last four years. With the accompaniment of Quentin, Rosa goes to Sutpen’s Hundred in order to find her cousin who has come back to die on his native soil. Despite her physical and emotional depression, Rosa later comes back with an ambulance to save Henry’s life. Nevertheless, Clytie thinks that Rosa is coming back with the police in order to charge Henry with the murder of Charles Bon. Assuming the role of the heroine of the Sutpen dynasty, Clytie, by setting the house on fire, gives an end to the legendary plantation of the Old South. It is noteworthy that Sutpen’s once monumental house is

destroyed by a black person who has appeared as a victim of the system of slavery all through the novel.

The two important factors that render the corruption and exhaustion of Thomas Sutpen's line inevitable are the son and grandson of Charles Bon. His son, Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, is never able to reconcile with the fact that he is part black. Despite Judith's protection and encouragement of him to go to the North, where he would not suffer from his black identity, Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon gets married with "a coal black and ape-like woman." (205) It can be argued that he does this in order to overcome the endless conflict about his identity. He looks white; however, he is aware of his trace of black blood. Therefore, his marriage with such a woman can be regarded as an ineffectual protest of the discrimination of races. The futility of Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon's attempt becomes clearer with the idiot son he begets from his 'ape-like' wife. The son, Jim Bond, is the last of Sutpen's descendants. The idiocy of Sutpen's only heir, and the dynasty which is now in ruins hint at the moral degradation of the Old South. Melvin Backman gives a comprehensive description of the South by drawing parallelisms with the devastation of Sutpen's 'design' as follows:

As the nineteenth century yielded to the twentieth, there survived the rotting house, its slave guardian [Clytie], the death-in-life heir (Henry), and the last Sutpen descendant – the idiot, Jim Bond. It had taken two generations for Bon to become Bond, good to become slave. Not much was left on the planter's baronial dream. Like the planter's mansion, the dream kept rotting. In December 1909 the house of Sutpen went up in smoke. Only the idiot remained. The others were dead. Dead was the planter with his double family [Thomas Sutpen], black and white; dead were the Coldfields, with the shopkeeper's [Mr. Coldfield] barren gentility; and dead was the poor white family of Wash Jones. (Backman, 1966: 110)

The deaths of the people who constitute the Sutpen saga indicate the impossibility of recovery for the Southern aristocracy. It was the system of slavery which caused the breakout of the Civil War; apparently, defeat and disintegration were not enough to make the Southern aristocrats forsake their hatred of the black race. Although it has been forty-four years since the prohibition of slavery, Jim Bond still appears as a debased victim of the system. Obviously, it is impossible for the South to change its established conducts about the hierarchies within the community. The members of

the Southern aristocracy succumb to passivity, and watch the downfall of their previously eminent tradition.

Indeed, Thomas Sutpen becomes the epitome of the man victimized by the rigidity of the norms of the Southern aristocracy. His fascination of the splendor of the Old South causes him to become a man "...even more ruthless and arrogant than the Virginia plantation lord who first hurt him into action. He becomes, in short, an extender of the same patriarchal, slave society that has victimized him, his family and his ancestors." (Minter, 1996: 223) What is noteworthy is the fact that the principles Old South play a crucial role in the moral corruption of the Southern man. Sutpen loses his humanity in order to overcome the contempt he faced with when he was a child. He can be regarded as a powerful hallmark of the South because of his rejection of "the limits that are imposed on human kind." (Rubin, 1985: 338) The desire of transcending these limits results in the devaluation and disregard of ethical values. Thus, it becomes clear in Faulkner's depiction of Thomas Sutpen that the fall of the Old South is a direct result of its moral degeneration.

2.2. The Failure of Reconciliation with the Old South:

Quentin Compson

“Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts?³⁹”

Although the story of *Absalom, Absalom!* seems to depend mainly upon the story of Thomas Sutpen’s ethical degeneration, and his eventual downfall, the presence of Quentin Compson serves for Faulkner’s project about the South in a broader sense. Faulkner explains the significance of the role Quentin plays as such:

The one I am writing now will be called DARK HOUSE⁴⁰ or something of that nature. It is the more or less violent breakup of a household or family from 1860 to about 1910. It is not as heavy as it sounds. The story is an anecdote which occurred during and right after the civil war; the climax is another anecdote which happened about 1910 and which explains the story. Roughly, the theme is a man who outraged the land, and the land then turned and destroyed the man’s family. Quentin Compson, of the *Sound & Fury*, tells it, or ties it together; he is the protagonist so that it is not complete apocrypha. I use him because it is just before he is to commit suicide because of his sister, and I use his bitterness which he has projected on the South in the form of hatred of it and its people to get more out of the story itself than a historical novel would be. (Minter, 1980: 143)

It is clear that in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin is experiencing an endless process of desperation about the history of his hometown. Richard P. Adams states: “Quentin’s failure...is partly due to his dismay over the way his ideal vision of what life ought to be in the South is continually undercut by his concrete knowledge of what it is and has been.” (Adams, 1968: 212) He cannot deal with the fact that the moral codes of the South are exhausted, and that the whole region is about to face a tragic doom in terms of respectability. Contrary to their previously gallant and proud manner, the members of the Southern aristocracy remain passive and succumb to fatalism. Thus, Quentin is completely left alone in his ideal of maintaining the moral center of his hometown, and this renders him troubled with a deep sense of hatred to the history of the South. In Quentin’s view, it is the moral decline of the region

³⁹ From the speech Mr. Compson’s makes to his son upon Miss Rosa’s invitation for Quentin to tell him the story of Sutpen. (Chapter 1 of *Absalom, Absalom!*, 12)

⁴⁰ Faulkner was initially considering naming *Absalom, Absalom!* as “Dark House”.

which corrupts the purity of his sister, and it is his lack of reconciling with the sins of the South that trigger his suicidal feelings. Along with his incapability of facing with this tragic situation, Quentin is in an endless experience of being haunted by the previously glorious days of the Southern aristocracy.

Quentin's agitation about the dishonor he has to face becomes stronger upon Miss Rosa's disclosing him the story of Sutpen. Rosa has heard that Quentin is attending Harvard, and she desires to tell him this story to supply him with material for his future literary aspirations. Ironically, rather than illuminating Quentin's view of his hometown, Sutpen's story makes him feel an irrecoverable disillusionment. Due to his oversensitive nature, Quentin immediately harmonizes with the gloomy mood of this old and tragic story. Faulkner designates the dichotomy of Quentin's mind, and his identification with the past as follows:

...creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*.⁴¹ Then hearing would reconcile and he would seem to listen to two separate Quentins now – the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts [Miss Rosa] which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was – the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople, in notlanguage... (9)

Quentin inevitably internalizes the conflict of the splendor and breakdown of the South all through his life. This emotional conflict becomes more effective as Quentin realizes that the history of his hometown is more tragic than he had thought. Initially, he listens to Rosa's version of the story and goes home to share this interesting experience with his father because he feels distressed about the disturbing facts about the Southern history. Rosa appears to him as one of the "...stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering..." (12) Quentin defines his own state of mind in relation with this suffocating atmosphere, which gives him a deep sense of anguish. He feels that "...his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth." (12) As a son of the

⁴¹"*Be Light*" is taken from the phrase "Let there be light," which is the English version of the Latin phrase "fiat lux." The phrase is related to the creation of light by God in the Old Testament.

South, Quentin can be regarded as contaminated with the sins of his hometown. Because of this, he can never be able to constitute his identity independent of the impositions of the Southern aristocracy.

The Old South attracts attention with its authenticity and history. This becomes clear upon the request Shreve makes to Quentin. He states: “*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...*” (174) In response, Quentin starts telling the story of Thomas Sutpen. It is significant that when he is asked to talk about his hometown, the first thing that comes to Quentin’s mind is this tragic and terrifying story. The reason for this can be clarified in terms of Quentin’s despondency about the morally debased condition of the Old South. The story of Sutpen includes the benevolent and malicious attributes of the South, simultaneously. Correspondingly, Quentin’s sentiments about the history of his hometown are in a conflict which is impossible for him to overcome. Melvin Backman portrays the noteworthiness of the dual aspect of Sutpen’s story in this way:

Faulkner has presented Sutpen as the source of evil, but he has presented him too as the only heroic figure in the story. Sutpen is both the pride and the shame of the South. For a Quentin Compson the ambivalence of his feelings about his heritage is further complicated by the reality of the present. His heritage is peculiarly compounded of accomplishment and defeat, innocence and guilt, pride and defensiveness. The ruthless planter-backwoodsman who built his house upon slavery and lived as if the evil were a positive good is dead and gone. For his descendants accomplishment has often become but a memory, pride has become delusion, and innocence has become unacknowledgeable guilt. As loyalty to the Old South has turned into savage racism, the planter’s power to act has deteriorated for his twentieth-century descendants into a stasis of will. (Backman, 1966: 111)

Obviously, the history of the South constitutes of oppositional concepts, and in *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin appears as the only character who is in a continuous emotional conflict about the present state of his hometown. His past is ‘peculiarly compounded of accomplishment and defeat;’ however, his present state is solely composed of failure and frustration. In particular, such unfavorable aspects of the present can be considered in relation with Quentin’s personal life. Apparently, there are significant parallelisms between the conflicts Henry Sutpen and Quentin encounter. Quentin can also be regarded as sympathizing or identifying himself with

Henry. Cleanth Brooks portrays the parallelisms of the lives of these two men in terms of Quentin's emotional state as depicted in *The Sound and the Fury*:

The Quentin presented in the novel [*The Sound and the Fury*] is guiltily aware of the fact that he proved unable to protect his sister from the man who got her with the child, or from her other casual lovers. Quentin took it hard that he could not, and felt that his own honor – even his own masculinity – had been called in question whereas Henry Sutpen had risen to the occasion, had dared all, had killed his best friend, and abandoned his home and his patrimony in order to defend what he felt to be his sister's honor and his own.

To say this is not to say Quentin condoned Henry's desperate act, but he did sympathize deeply with Henry as he confronted the agonizing choice set before him. Moreover, his own conduct must, in the light of Henry's horrifyingly heroic action, have seemed all the more weak and pusillanimous. (Brooks, 1983: 213, 214)

As stated in the above quotation, Quentin's trouble is his inadequacy to cope with the corruption of his sister's purity. In a broader perspective, it is his failure of overcoming the new disrespectful state his hometown. Quentin's distress in this matter can be clarified by comparing his passivity with Henry's braveness. Henry becomes a murderer and does not hesitate to renounce his birthright in order to protect his honor whereas Quentin's motionless state ends up in his suicide.

The story of the Sutpen dynasty awakens in Quentin the desire of a "...quest to discover the truth about the rise and fall of the South." (Backman, 1966: 88) Beginning with Shreve's curiosity about the South, the two young men make noteworthy conjectures about the Sutpen saga. In other words, their guesswork can be regarded as an attempt to discover the nature of historical truth. (Brooks, 1963: 309) Quentin's depression becomes apparent once more when his attitude is compared with Shreve's. For Shreve, the quest of the discovery of truth is merely a kind of game in which he combines all the facts he knows, and reaches a conclusion. He states: "Jesus, the South is fine, isn't it. It's better than the theatre, isn't it." (217) On the other hand, Quentin is totally captivated by the sense of tragedy which the history of the South awakens in him. His ancestors have undergone failure and guiltiness, and this kind of a heritage is impossible for Quentin to acknowledge. (Brooks, 1963: 312, 314)

Quentin's distressing ancestral heritage plays a crucial role in his strong sense of hopelessness. Additionally, his father's entirely fatalistic attitude makes Quentin's

psychological condition worse. While he is telling Quentin the details of Sutpen's story, he makes statements which describe his hopelessness about the resurrection of the South. This is evident in his following description of the heroic figures that have gone through the bitterness of the Civil War:

...that day and time, of a dead time; 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 and the figures therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but distinct, uncomplex who had the gift of loving once or dying once instead of being diffused and scattered creatures drawn blindly limb from limb from a grab bag and assembled, author and victim too of a thousand homicides and a thousand copulations and divorcements. (89)

The above quotation can also be regarded as a portrayal of the indifference of the Southern community to the notion of gallantry, which was once one of the crucial ethical values of the Old South. However, the destructiveness of the war rendered the Southern aristocrats incapable of maintaining their moral integrity. Charles Bon's following statements to Henry designate the South's irrecoverable losses in terms of its long-established moral values:

...It wont be much longer now and then there wont be anything left: we wont even have anything to do left, not even the privilege of walking backward slowly for a reason, for the sake of honor and what's left of pride. Not God; evidently we have done without Him for four years, only He just didn't think to notify us; and not only not shoes and clothing but not even any need for them, and not only no land or any way to make food, but no need for the food since we have learned to live without that too; and so if you don't have God and you don't need food and clothes and shelter, there isn't anything for honor and pride to climb on and hold to and flourish. And if you haven't got honor and pride, then nothing matters. (349)

Clearly, for noble men such as Mr. Compson, defeat is equal to the loss of honor and pride of the Southern community. Thus, it is natural for him to reflect his fatalism to Quentin because the failure of his hometown is not a fact with which he can reconcile. Quentin's psychological burden can be clarified through his up-bringing by such a feeble figure of a father. The details of the history of the South, which he learns through the story of Thomas Sutpen makes Quentin feel a stronger despondency. Ilse D. Lind describes the emotional states of the father and son in this way:

Quentin and Mr. Compson are General Compson's heirs, the inheritors not only of his broad intelligence and conscience, but also of the altered social status which the Civil War brought out. Retaining the refinements of culture and sensibility perpetuated in family tradition, but deprived through historical circumstance of a proper field in which they may be exercised, Mr. Compson and Quentin are both rendered incapable of action...They lack aggressiveness completely. Mr. Compson's manner of coping with life is through intellectual analysis undertaken from the refuge of personal retreat; Quentin, as the unfortunate heir of his spiritual bankruptcy and further declined status, is equipped only with excessive sensibility and illusion. (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 284, 285)

Thomas Sutpen and Quentin appear as the two major figures that carry the narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!* on. It can be stated that Thomas Sutpen represents the sins of the South thematically. Almost everything that takes place in his lifetime is a typical instance of the human errors displayed by the Southern aristocrats. In this case, it is evident that Quentin is "...the central intelligence through whom, with the help of Shreve McCannon, the story of Sutpen comes to us." (Adams, 1968: 174) Until the last chapter of the novel, Quentin primarily appears as a listener and observer of the two different versions of the Sutpen saga, disclosed by Mr. Compson and Miss Rosa. However, Quentin begins to play an active role in the interpretation of the story from the sixth chapter on. Finally, in the last chapter, it becomes clear that he has evaluated the story according to his own psychological and social background, along with his own sense of morality. According to Richard P. Adams, Quentin's presence as the 'central intelligence' makes him the protagonist of the novel. He portrays his argument in terms of the intertwinement of the stories of Sutpen and Quentin:

He [Quentin] is so intensely involved in the process of assimilating the material of the story, making something out of it as he organizes it in and for the telling, and registering his reactions to it, that the resulting narrative becomes to a large degree the story of his own development in understanding and wisdom. Or it may be, as it mostly seems to be with Quentin, the story of his failure to develop those qualities and his consequent bafflement, frustration, and static exclusion from the moving world of experience, or life. The "history" in the book is perhaps more concerned with the fictional biography of Quentin than with that of Sutpen or, in any direct way, with the actual rise and fall of the plantation aristocracy of the South. (Adams, 1968: 174)

Due to his intense involvement in both the glory and decline of the South, Quentin is unable to maintain his impartiality in the interpretation of the Sutpen saga. At this

point, his Canadian roommate Shreve McCannon steps in as the only character in the novel that has an objective view of the Southern history. His detachment to the problematic issues of the South enables him to build up an eccentric theory about the future dominance of the black race. Shreve mentions his theory as such:

I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it won't quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like rabbits and the birds do, so they won't show up so sharp against the snow. But it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings. (378)

Now that their reinterpretation of Sutpen's story has ended, Shreve easily adapts himself to actual life. "Though the spell of the story has been powerful enough to fire his imagination and involve all his sympathies, he is not personally committed, and we can see him drawing back from the tragic problem and becoming again the cheery, cynical, common-sense man of the present day." (Brooks, 1963: 317) However, escaping from the harsh facts about the history of the South is impossible for Quentin. He can be regarded as trapped within the exhausted tradition of the Old South. He can neither accept, nor reject the history of his hometown. Warren Beck states: "The man [Quentin] who had known war's horrors in his youth seems to have brought back an enlarged perspective which discerned the decadence of his native region while still holding on its associations with it." (Beck, 1976: 20) Consequently, it is natural for Quentin to feel a kind of hatred for his hometown. Shreve concludes that his roommate hates the South because all through his interpretation of the history of the South, Quentin implies his hatred to the region. Eventually, when Shreve asks him why he hates the South, Quentin rejects his hatred hysterically, trembling in his bed. Melvin Backman's commentary about Quentin's state of mind in the last scene of the novel is as follows:

The vision of the South which Quentin invoked left him shivering, "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). Even in the alien air of New England the South was too much with him. The burden of its history lay heavy upon Quentin Compson. Torn by loyalty and guilt, by the desire to defend and the need to expiate, by the desire to suppress and the need to confess, he could only cry out against his burden. And this is how the novel ends with the sins of the past unexpiated and the dilemma of the present irresolvable. (Backman, 1966: 112)

It is clear that Quentin's overwhelming burden is impossible for him to overcome. Unable to face with the everlasting conflict about the South, he commits suicide nearly five months after his exploration of the Old South with Shreve.

In fact, Faulkner depicted his own burden about the reconciliation with the Old South by creating such a sensitive and vulnerable character as Quentin Compson. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, he is the only figure who has such a keen notion of the legacy of the Southern aristocracy. Undoubtedly, Thomas Sutpen's story, which is presented as the epitome of the Southern myth, affects the present thoroughly. Thus, in Faulkner's view, the present state of the South is the reflection of its past, and because of its irredeemable sins, the South can never be resurrected. Eventually, the grandeur and the breakdown of the Southern aristocracy remain as a myth as depicted in the works of William Faulkner.

3. The Style of Faulkner's Fiction: The Re-enactment of the South through the Narrative

AMONG AMERICAN NOVELISTS OF THE PRESENT CENTURY only William Faulkner has created an imaginary world that is complete in itself, or perhaps one should say almost complete in itself. For while Faulkner commands the past of his Yoknapatawpha County as a fund of legend, memory, and pain, what he can summon of it in a given book tends to be partial and fragmented. As a rule, his view of the past comes to him in brilliant gasps and flashes. His central subject has remained constant, but each return to it has an air of improvisation, as if he were forever seeing his world in a new way. (Howe, 1962: 3)

The novels of William Faulkner are generally regarded as *tours de force*⁴² in that they display great artistry both thematically and stylistically. The fictional elements that constitute his novels are in such a wholeness that it is almost impossible to handle them separately. This is mainly due to his manner of developing the themes of his novels in parallel with his style.

As stated previously, it was dreadfully difficult for Faulkner to accept the terrifying facts about the South because of his profound devotion to his hometown. Neither in *The Sound and the Fury*, nor in *Absalom, Absalom!* was he able to offer any verifiable solution to the major concerns of the South such as racism, slavery, and the eventual breakdown of the Southern aristocracy. Because of his ineffectuality in settling these issues, Faulkner's feelings about his hometown seem to be ambivalent. In fact, he is keenly aware of the sins of the Old South, which caused its catastrophic collapse; and it is exactly this awareness that he wants to blur by elaborating his fiction with a rich and heavy style. Richard C. Moreland describes the relationship of the world that Faulkner is dealing with, and the style of his novels in this way:

The world of his work does not feel natural, comfortable, or recognizable in the way that realist work feels to many readers. It does not effectively contain its society's self-criticisms and discontents, or reduce those conflicts to terms an individual character, narrator, or reader can resolve. There are profound social and psychological problems here, problems that disturb the flow of almost every sentence, and there is no comfortable position from which to view these problems, or not for long. (Weinstein, 1998: 24, 25)

⁴² The French term *tour de force* is used to describe literary works which require the skill and virtuosity of both the writer and the reader.

The modernist literary techniques that Faulkner employs in his novels play an important role in his formation of his dense style. *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* can be regarded as salient examples of the modern American novel. Both of the novels display the major themes of modernist literature such as the collapse of the social and cultural norms, the dislocation of meaning from its customary context, and the displacement and the desperate state of the self, both physically and mentally. The chief stylistic elements of modernist literature are in parallel with its thematic components. Thus, the technique of stream of consciousness⁴³, interior monologues, the disruption of chronology and syntax, extremely long and fragmented sentences, and amplexness of adjectives and adverbs become remarkable features of Faulkner's style. What is noteworthy is the fact that Faulkner employs such stylistic elements in order to distract the reader's attention. He deliberately evades maintaining the problematic issues of the South as the focus of both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* As a matter of fact, Faulkner's endless digressions from the main issues serve for his desire to avoid the presence of a moralizing voice in his works.

The most important means through which Faulkner carried out his narrative technique are the features of his characters and narrators. He is generally interested in extraordinary individuals who reflect the moral corruption of the Old South. Maurice Edgar Coindreau states: "Degenerates, madmen, and idiots are William Faulkner's favorite characters. Using his technique of the unexpressed, he makes them into figures of astonishing power." (Coindreau, 1971: 28) Benjy and Quentin Compson, and Rosa Coldfield can be accepted as the major characters that fit this definition in *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* The fundamental difficulty that these figures come across is their conflict with the advancement of time. In fact, the problematic state of Faulkner's characters is a reflection of his own failure of reconciliation with the present state of the South. As a result of this, his

⁴³ There are various forms of stream of consciousness writing, the major ones of which are 'narrated stream of consciousness,' and 'quoted stream of consciousness' (interior monologue). Generally, these two forms of writing are mistakenly used as synonyms. 'Narrated stream of consciousness' is mainly a narrative presentation of a character's psychological state in free indirect style. Interior monologue is the direct presentation of a character's thoughts in quotation marks.

narrators can be regarded as reflecting the distress which Faulkner himself feels. David Minter describes the functions of Faulkner's narrators in this way:

Through the ordeals of his narrators, Faulkner broadens and intensifies his novel. For they share not only a task but a variety of gifts and a variety of wounds and grievances. They know literature, and they possess a gift for language, even a love of it. But as they begin to work with their sources – with “the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking,” with “a few old mouth to mouth tales” – we begin to see that their claim to authority has only a little to do with gifts and less to do with precision and objectivity. Although they tell a story that is “probably true enough,” they discover it through the wounds they hide and the grievances they bear. Time and again they are able to locate correspondences between stories they have read, the stories they have lived, and the story they are trying to tell. (Minter, 1980: 156)

Apparently, Faulkner's narrators enable an exploration of the depths of the consciousness of the Southerners who have witnessed the devastation of their long-established aristocratic tradition. Each of the narrators makes his/her presentation depending upon his/her personal experiences, and relation with the concept of time. As a result of their different approaches, the reader is able to grasp multiple aspects of the events which are presented in differing time zones. Thus, Faulkner's notion of the concept of time should be analyzed as one of the major points which shape his narrative technique. In Faulkner's view, time is a fluid entity in which present and past merge. Thus, he does not regard the past as a completed series of events. Faulkner accepts the past as the ultimate source which determines the present. Jean Paul Sartre's following statements clarify the importance of the past for Faulkner:

Faulkner's vision of the world seems comparable to that of a man seated in an open car and looking backwards. At each instant, formless shadows, flutterings, vague tremblings, and a kind of confetti of light appear to the right and to the left, but only with distance do they become trees, men, and automobiles. The past takes on a kind of super-reality; its contours are firm and clear, unchangeable. The present, undefined and fleeting, is weak by comparison. It is full of holes, and the things of the past invade it through these holes – things that are fixed, immovable, silent as judges or stares. Faulkner's monologues remind us of airplane flights replete with air pockets: at each pocket the hero's consciousness “falls into the past” and then rises only to fall again. The present is not; it becomes; everything *was*... (Coindreau, 1971: 70)

As past becomes the present, Faulkner's characters do not have a chance to move back and forth in time; consequently, they cannot break away from the past.

The present constitutes of degeneration and disasters, and because of the power of the past, there is no future for these characters. Ward L. Miner describes this distressing situation as follows:

For the characters in his novels there is only what Faulkner calls *now*. But his *now* is more of a past including the present and the future than it is a present including the past and the future. To say the same thing in other words, the force of the past is so great that it permits only a present to exist, not a future. So the characters struggle in their miasmal present, having no hopes for the future. (Miner, 1952: 125)

It is evident that the advancement of time becomes a devastating experience which Faulkner's characters can never overcome. Faulkner reflects this unfavorable situation upon his narrative by projecting the past to the present. Complying with the incoherent states of mind of his characters, this projection lacks linearity. At this point, Faulkner's masterful use of the stream of consciousness technique serves for the rendition of his characters' experiences in fragments. Thus, it becomes impossible for his characters to move onwards; because in his novels, Faulkner arrests motion through the disruption of chronology, and combines the stream of consciousness with his characters' lack of conciliation with time.

The disruption of chronology and the technique of stream of consciousness are two of the principle stylistic devices that Faulkner makes use of. Warren Beck states: "Faulkner's rangings through a narrative's chronology are most often cast within someone's recollections and forward returns; these major figures have their existence in the midst of things, looking before and after; this communicated distilling of the matter's essence reveals the individual most clearly; it also creates a true dramatic intensity..." (Beck, 1976: 146) Apparently, the memory flows of his characters are significant in the form of Faulkner's works. The direct and immediate presentation of their experiences through interior monologues and the stream of consciousness enables the reader to comprehend their emotional reactions in uttermost profoundness. The following statements of Warren Beck define the effects of Faulkner's novelistic style upon the reader:

It is not emphatic; rather it is a slow prolonged movement, nothing dashing, even at its fullest flood, but surging with an irresistible momentum. His effects insofar as they depend upon prose rhythms are never staccato, they are cumulative rather than abrupt. Such a prose rhythm supplements the

contributions of full vocabulary and lengthy sentence toward suspension rather than impact, and consequently toward deep realization rather than quick surprise. And the prolonged even murmur of Faulkner's voice throughout his pages is an almost hypnotic induction into those detailed and darkly-colored visions of life which drift across the horizons of his imagination like clouds - great yet vaporous, changing yet enduring, unearthly yet of common substance. (Beck, 1976: 48)

It can be argued that Faulkner wanted the reader to empathize with the psychological states of his characters. At this point, his employment of the theme of repetition should be analyzed. In both *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner's endless repetitive patterns serve for two of his primary concerns. The first one is his desire to enable the reader to acquire a strong sense of empathy with the characters. He creates this effect by repeating the tragic experiences and feelings of his characters multiple times, through their own memory flows. Faulkner's second and perhaps most important concern is blurring the main problematic issues of the South by constantly repeating subjects which might have been handled more lightly. Thus, the reader is presented an overall evaluation of the events through repetition, indirection and digression, and s/he has to draw his/her own conclusions from the presented information. Correspondingly, Hortense J. Spillers states: "...Faulkner seems to achieve striking emotional intensity and affect by accumulation in repetition, analogy, and correspondence or correlation in lines and scenes that do not always "go" somewhere, although they stir up quite a commotion. We should take a minute to try to explain how it happens." (Spillers, 2003: 340, 341) When the reader manages to combine the presented data in his/her mind, s/he expects to reach a solution for the despair s/he has internalized throughout the act of reading. However, according to Faulkner's project of evading the moralizing voice, this becomes a futile expectation. The following noteworthy quotation from *Absalom, Absalom!* can be regarded as describing the feelings of the Faulkner reader thoroughly:

They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure

that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (101)

What is notable about the above quotation is the fact that it describes the helpless condition of the Southern aristocrats, and the reader simultaneously. The Southerners in Faulkner's fiction are incapable of preserving their integrity without the system of slavery. The lack of the system which they had practiced for nearly a century rendered them unable to formulate any solution to the breakdown of the Southern aristocracy. Similarly, the reader comes across the lack of a system; the lack of all the stylistic elements of the realistic fiction that s/he has been accustomed to for centuries. Eventually, Faulkner, with his masterful presentation of events, succeeds in creating the parallelism between the theme and style in his novels.

Apparently, Faulkner's literary style enabled him to portray the attributes of the South which he could never wholly accept. Almost every character and the stylistic device that he employs serves for the portrayal of both the nobility and discourtesy of the Old South. Correspondingly, the narrative techniques that he adopts enable him to remain both inside and outside the unacceptable facts about the South. As a result, the harmony of form and content in Faulkner's fiction can be accepted as playing the crucial role in his exposition of the tragic events as if they were the personal experiences of every single reader.

3.1. Structuring the Narrative upon the Displacement and Deprivation of the Self: *The Sound and the Fury*

The structure of *The Sound and the Fury* is essentially musical. Like a composer, Faulkner uses the system of themes. There is not, as in a fugue, a simple theme which develops and undergoes transformations; there are multiple themes which start out, vanish, and reappear to disappear again until the moment they sound forth in all their richness. One thinks of impressionist compositions, mysterious and chaotic on first hearing, but firmly structured beneath their confused appearance. *The Sound and the Fury* is a novel of atmosphere which suggests more than it says, a sort of *Night on Bald Mountain*⁴⁴ penetrated by a diabolical wind in which damned souls are whirling, a cruel poem of hatred with each movement precisely characterized. (Coindreau, 1971: 43, 44)

The Sound and the Fury is basically the story of Caddy Compson, which is told by four different narrators. Each of her brothers (Benjy, Quentin, and Jason) feels her absence in different terms, and each of them gives voice to their feelings in their own sections. As a matter of fact, the first three sections demonstrate the pathetic situation of the three brothers in terms of both content and style. The reasons of their suffering from the absence of Caddy, and their expression of themselves through their own memory flows serve for Faulkner's project about the style of the novel. Unlike the previous sections, the narration of the fourth section of the novel constitutes of the authorial voice. This kind of a portrayal serves for Faulkner's purpose to offer a completely objective point of view in the rendition of his feelings about the collapse of the moral integrity of the South. Moreover, this section provides a detached manner in the criticism of the displeasing events that took place in the history of Faulkner's hometown. Irving Howe states: "When he wishes to create an atmosphere of closeness and involvement Faulkner depends on stream of consciousness; but toward the end, except when describing the Negro revival meeting, he writes in a style of clipped notation ... signifying distance and revulsion." (Howe, 1962: 161)

Through the breakdown of the Compson family, every four chapter of *The Sound and the Fury* portrays the moral corruption of the Southern aristocracy in terms of the different aspects of Faulkner's intense style. The tone, rhetoric, and

⁴⁴ *Night on Bald Mountain* is a poem by Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky, a Russian composer. The work is famous for its tortuous compositional history.

narrative technique in each section display diversity because of the different states of mind and feelings of the Compson brothers about Caddy. This is evident in Richard Gray's following statements:

Each section of the book, in fact, represents a different series of strategies, another attempt to know her [Caddy]. Not only that, each section asks us to consider what 'knowing' means: how the human subject uses voices, and is used by voices, as he tries to position himself in the world. Essentially, the difference in each section is a matter of code and rhetoric: in the sense that each time the tale is told another language, an alternative model is devised and a different set of relationships occurs between author, narrator, subject and reader. (Gray, 1996: 140)

In the light of the above quotation, it can be argued that Faulkner's preference of employing four different narrators points at the subjectivity of their presentations. However, despite this multiplicity, each of the Compson brothers fails to make a precise portrayal of their emotional state. The correspondence of their deprivation of Caddy's presence and the style of the novel is apparent in their unsuccessfulness at using language as a means to express their feelings. From a different viewpoint, this can be regarded as the failure of the medium of language to convey meaning, which becomes one of the major themes in the novel. Richard Gray states: "Through a complex and constantly fluctuating series of relations between those speaking, those being spoken to, and those being spoken of, Faulkner obliges the reader (who is, of course, one of those being spoken to) to see the language that is the medium of the novel also as its subject: to recognize how we constitute our reality, personal or social, with the words we use." (Gray, 1996: 138)

The first section of the novel, *April Seventh, 1928*, can be regarded as a salient example that depicts the theme of the failure of language. It is narrated by the mentally retarded youngest son of the three Compson brothers, Benjamin Compson. It is apparent that Faulkner employed Benjy in order to make a clearer presentation of the themes of disorder, disintegration, and the absence of perspective through his mental impotence. Benjy's idiocy can be regarded as the most appropriate means for the rendition the psychological confusions of the major characters. (Tredell, 1999: 57) Benjy appears as a speechless and bellowing figure that cannot make sense of certain abstract concepts such as past and present, and cause and effect. He is only

able to react to the things that he sees, hears, or touches by moaning. Maurice Edgar Coindreau states: “For him nothing exists except animal sensations. Of these he has made himself a world in which he moves about without ever feeling restricted by notions of space and time.” (Coindreau, 1971: 44) However, Benjy is highly sensitive about anything that happens out of its established order. In fact, he is the only member of the Compsons that is able to sense the moral degeneration of the family. Although the sound and fury that Benjy makes constitutes nearly all of the first section, his reaction lacks significance because of his incapability of transforming his senses into words. The most important illustration of the failure of language is the scene in which Benjy catches one of the school girls that pass in front of the gate in which Benjy is standing. Although he senses that he is re-uniting with Caddy, Benjy appears to be attacking the girl from the outside. The following quotation exemplifies Benjy’s inability to express his feelings through his unstable memory:

They [the girls] came on. I opened the gate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes⁴⁵ began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. They were going up the hill to where it fell away and I tried to cry. But when I breathed in, I couldn’t breathe out again to cry, and I tried to keep from falling off the hill and I fell of the hill into the bright whirling shapes. (64)

Faulkner depicts Benjy’s failure of comprehending the concepts of time, the past and the present by disrupting the chronology of the first section entirely. The present day of his section takes place in the year 1928; however, almost every event that the reader is presented takes place in the past. It can be argued that Benjy’s mental retardation has two main functions in terms of the style of *The Sound and the Fury*. The first one works for Faulkner’s purpose of forming an objective portrayal of the events that will be handled throughout the novel. Because of his idiocy, Benjy can neither lie nor comment upon the events that he recalls. Moreover, due to his mental retardation, Benjy cannot make the distinction of the differing time zones in his memory flow. In his essay [*The Meaning of Form*] *The Sound and the Fury*,

⁴⁵ When Benjy is happy, he mentions bright circular shapes that he sees. In this scene, he both sees and stops seeing the shapes because he cannot feel precisely whether the girl is Caddy or not.

Donald M. Kartiganer describes Benjy's relation with time in connection with his mental retardation:

Time as duration ... is what Faulkner is alluding to ... and it is this sense of time that Benjy, by virtue of his idiocy, has abandoned. Memory does not serve him as it serves the normal mind, becoming part of the mind and integral to the stream of constantly created perception that makes it up: the past which ... "gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances." ... Benjy does not recall, and therefore cannot interpret, the past from the perspective of the present; nor does the past help to determine that perspective. Instead of past and present being a continuum, each influencing the meaning of the other, they have no temporal dimension at all. They are isolated, autonomous moments that do not come "before" or "after." (Minter, 1994: 330)

The second function of Benjy's flawed mental state is its stylistic reflections on his narrative. It should initially be stated that the fragmentation in his narrative is not a product of the stream of consciousness technique. Warren Beck states: "Benjy sees and hears the others and directly registers enough physical phenomena to constitute the scene even though he has no understanding except through fragments of simple memories adventitiously associated with previous overt experience, and his consciousness is not so much a stream as a succession of momentary apprehensions even less cumulative than in the most idle reverie." (Beck, 1976: 180) Hence, it is Benjy's abnormal state of mind that causes the sudden shifts of time in his narrative. John T. Matthews describes Faulkner's objectives about Benjy's relation with the concept of time, and its reflections upon his narrative as follows:

The technique of shifting from one of Benjy's remembered time zones to another – without warning or transition of any sort – constitutes Faulkner's strategy for showing how Benjy remains innocent of the abstraction of passing time. Benjy does not envision a personal time line on which every event takes its consecutive place, earlier events fading and recent ones remaining fresh. Rather, every moment impressed onto his consciousness survives as a vivid cluster of images and sensations. As a result, fragments of his whole life remain intensely present to Benjy. But at the same time he can never master his sense of loss or comprehend the workings of time and their effect on his identity. Benjy stands at the mercy of whatever associations have been forged in his mind. (Matthews, 1991: 36)

The theme of repetition should be analyzed as another stylistic device that is in relation with the discontinuity of Benjy's narrative. Whenever he senses the moral

corruption or the absence of Caddy, Benjy's unexceptional reaction is his constant howling or bellowing. Consequently, it can be stated that Benjy adopts repetition as a remedy for his endless distress about the lack of Caddy's affection. In Benjy's mind, this experience of deprivation is continually triggered by the words and events that remind him of Caddy. The best illustration for this is the scene in which Luster is walking Benjy near the golf course which had been sold for Quentin's education at Harvard. When the golf players call "caddie," Benjy begins to moan and cry. While he is walking quietly on his own, the homonym of the name of his sister activates his sense of loss and despair. The following statements of Hortense J. Spillers describe Faulkner's stylistic intentions in this context:

... Faulknerian narrative space is frequently redefined as temporal porosity – the overlay, the superimposition of "times," whereby a single space is filled up with discontinuous properties, in some cases, triggered by associative devices, in some others, an opening, or cleavage along the seams of memory, in still others, simple juxtaposition. In any case, we are confronting alignments that are both *contiguous* (juxtaposition that would define an interval) and *continuous* (the wreck and ruin of the same). The sign-vehicle "Caddy" / "caddie" appears in all three cases: as a proper name, with its paronomastic figure in the homonym of "caddie," it is both juxtapositional and associational in Benjy's narrative; it performs a juxtapositional, or contiguous, function, as well as an associational one... (Spillers, 2003: 370)

It is apparent that Benjy's endless time shifts and the confusion they cause are settled through the issues about Caddy. All of the events that disturb Benjy's unstable mind are presented through discontinuity. However, although Caddy is never present in the novel to speak for herself, she plays the crucial role of the unifying center in the novel. Thus, even the sound of the word "caddie" is enough to integrate the presented data in the readers' mind.

A rather different instance of mental disturbance can be observed in the eldest of the Compson brothers, Quentin. Just like Benjy, he is deeply troubled with the concept of time. However, the striking difference between the two brothers is the elder's incessant obsession with the past. He states: "I was. I am not." (216) Every single deed that takes place in Quentin's memory flow is from the past, especially about Caddy, because of his obsession about her purity. In this regard, the title of his section, *June Second 1910*, attracts attention. It is noteworthy that Faulkner, by dating this chapter before the others, hints at the fact that the destructiveness of time

will be the prevailing theme throughout the section. The opening paragraph of Quentin's narrative is full of words and phrases that signal what the reader is to come across with both thematically and stylistically:

When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. It was Grandfather's and when father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or 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. (93)

Shadows, time, watches, and despair appear as the recurrent themes in *June Second 1910*. This paragraph is also significant in that it implies the dissolution of the coherence of Quentin's narrative. Although the statements belong to Mr. Compson, they are conveyed to the reader through Quentin's memory flow, and it cannot be decided whether the spelling mistakes belong to the father or the son. The adjective 'excruciating' is transformed into an adverb by the use of a hyphen. Moreover, the Latin phrase 'reductio ad absurdum'⁴⁶ is mistakenly referred to as 'reducto absurdum.' These errors can be pointing at Mr. Compson's speech defect because of his alcoholism, and Quentin might have added the suffix '-ly' in order to correct his father. However, it is also possible that they can be implications of the loss of the coherence of Quentin's narrative with his progressing mental dissolution.

Another problem from which Quentin suffers deeply is his failure of distinguishing between space and time. His difference from Benjy in this matter is his appearance of a sane Southern gentleman who is able to express his reactions through the use of language. However, like Benjy, an event that happens on the present day triggers Quentin's memories of the past. At such moments, Quentin confuses these events and sometimes performs unintelligible acts. For instance, while

⁴⁶ 'Reductio ad absurdum' means 'reduction to the absurd.' It is a kind of a logical argument where one reaches an absurd result, and then thinks that the initial hypothesis is nonsense because it has led him/her to an absurd conclusion. Mr. Compson defines time as a reductio ad absurdum because time is generally accepted as a redeeming entity. However, his life experience has proved him exactly the opposite of this assumption. Thus, in Mr. Compson's view, time becomes a destructive entity, and "the reducto absurdum of all human experience."

he is traveling in the car with his friends, he slides into a kind of trance and shifts into the day when he had a fight with Caddy's boyfriend, Dalton Ames. Unconsciously, he equals Gerald, one of his friends in the car, with Dalton, and begins fighting with the former as if he was fighting with the latter. Obviously, Quentin is performing the act which he wasn't courageous enough to display when he had met Dalton in the past, and such kind of a behavior signals the fact that he has serious mental problems. Faulkner portrays this confusing situation by disrupting the narrative form in the scene of Quentin's trance. He removes all of the punctuation marks, does not capitalize letters, and discomposes meaning in some of the statements. The following quotation is from Quentin's trance in the car, and it exemplifies the stated stylistic attributes of his narrative:

[Quentin:] Ill kill you don't think that just because I look like a kid to you.
the smoke flowed in two jets from his nostrils across his face
[Dalton:] how old are you
[Quentin:] I began to shake my hands were on the rail I thought if I hid
them hed know why
Ill give you until tonight [to leave town]
[Dalton:] listen buddy whats your name Benjy's the natural isnt he you
are
Quentin
...
[Quentin:] did you ever have a sister did you
[Dalton:] no but theyre all bitches (198, 199)

The little Italian girl, who follows Quentin on June 2nd, the present day of the section on which he commits suicide, can be set forth as another example about his obsession with Caddy. Evidently, his calling this girl 'sister' hints at Quentin's identification of her with Caddy's childhood. Playing the role of the responsible brother, Quentin keeps asking where she lives; however, she does not speak. Quentin states: "I've got to do something with her. Much obliged. Come on, sister." (161) Remaining speechless, the girl insists on following Quentin. The following time shift to the childhood years of the Compson siblings can be regarded as exemplifying this identification on the narrative:

"Do you live down this way?" She said nothing. She walked beside me, under my elbow sort of, eating [the bread that Quentin had bought her]. We went on. It was quiet, hardly anyone about *getting the odour of honeysuckle*⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Throughout Quentin's section, honeysuckle is used in relation with his incestuous desire to Caddy.

all mixed She would have told me not to let me sit there on the steps hearing her door twilight slamming hearing Benjy still crying Supper she would have to come down when getting honeysuckle all mixed up in it. We reached the corner. (160)

Faulkner's use of disordered time sequences also serves for his project of evading the significance of certain events that the Southern aristocracy does not want to acknowledge, one of which is incest. Because of his obsession with Caddy's purity, Quentin cannot accept the fact that she has lost her virginity. In order to cover up her dishonorable state, he makes up a lie about his committing incest with Caddy, and confesses this to his father. However, the way Faulkner depicts this confession is significant in that the reader captures it between the lines. In the following quotation, Quentin is thinking about Mr. Compson's consideration of the awareness of time as an idle habit. The reader comes across Quentin's shocking confession unexpectedly:

*If it had been cloudy I would have looked at the window, thinking what he said about idle habits. Thinking it would be nice for them down at New London if the weather held up like this. Why shouldn't it? The month of brides, the voice that breathed *She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent. Roses. Roses. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of. Roses. Not virgins like dogwood, milkweed. I said I have committed incest, Father I said. Roses. Cunning and serene. If you attend Harvard one year, but don't see the boat race, there should be a refund. Let Jason have it. Give Jason a year at Harvard. (95)**

The above quotation not only exemplifies Faulkner's intention of hiding the disrespectful theme of incest, but also his masterful use of the techniques of stream of consciousness, and repetition. While Quentin is thinking about the weather, 'the month of brides' suddenly reminds him of Caddy's wedding. Later on, the cunningness of roses reminds him of impurity, and then he remembers his moment of confession about the incest he had committed with Caddy. Additionally, in the following pages of his section, Quentin goes on musing incoherently about the same issue, constantly repeating his despair about Caddy's absence and moral corruption. However, the incompleteness of his statements that take place in his memory flow can also be accepted as a part of Faulkner's intention of molding the theme of incest in between other issues. The following quotation from Quentin's memory flow about Mrs. Compson's statements can be set forth as a further example to all of the stated attributes of the section:

Why shouldn't you I want my boys to be more than friends yes Candace and Quentin more than friends *Father I have committed* what a pity you had no brother or sister *No sister no sister had no sister* Don't ask Quentin he and Mr. Compson both feel a little insulted when I am strong enough to come down to the table I am going on nerve now I'll pay for it after it's all over and you have taken my little daughter away from me *My little sister had no...* (116, 117)

Thus, it can be argued that the endless repetitive patterns in Quentin's narrative present the reader with a highly intense view of the tragedy he undergoes. The more Quentin repeats his grief, the more the reader sympathizes with his incurable mental disturbance, and his experience of deprivation. Hortense J. Spillers states: "Quentin's madness ... exhibits a perfection and precision of logic that now relentlessly looks ahead to a syntax that not only repeats the textual grooves in which consciousness is stuck,... but repeats as if compelled by law, and it is the law of a missed encounter with reality ... that repetition is said to commemorate." (Spillers, 2003: 356)

Another noteworthy point that should be discussed about the above quotations is the way Faulkner makes use of italics to indicate the shifts into the past. However, he does not do this in a regular order. He evades such an order in order to portray the irregularity and the incorrigibility of the intertwinement of past and present. Thus, he depicts the hardships that Faulkner's use of time causes upon his narrative. This also renders the act of reading *The Sound and the Fury* more challenging.

The religious and historical allusions that take place in Quentin's section are also significant because of the parallelism they display with his thoughts and feelings. The reference to Saint Francis⁴⁸ that takes place at the beginning of the section is obviously related with his sense of loss about Caddy. Quentin states, "And the good Saint Francis that said Little Sister Death, that never had a sister." (94) Additionally, the allusion to John Keble's *Holy Matrimony*⁴⁹ during his shift to the scene of Caddy's wedding is noteworthy. Quentin's reference to the poem as, "*the voice that breathed o'er Eden*" (100) stands for his imagination of his relationship with Caddy as husband and wife. Lastly, the reference to Sir Walter Scott's poem, *Marmion*, during the scene in which Quentin meets Herbert Head, Caddy's future

⁴⁸ Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) was a religious figure who spoke of his sufferings as his sisters.

⁴⁹ John Keble's *Holy Matrimony* is a religious poem that glorifies marriage.

husband, is notable about his feelings to Caddy. Apparently, Quentin is identifying himself with the brave highlander in the poem, Lochinvar, who rides off with the woman he loves in front of the groom and the guests. Thus, Quentin can only unite with Caddy in his imagination, by dreaming about the chivalric manners of the Southern gentleman, which he is incapable of performing in his actual life.

Jason's section, *April Sixth 1928*, constitutes of a completely different style, tone, and rhetoric than the sections of Benjy, and Quentin. It is notable that Faulkner has assembled all the themes about moral degeneration in this section, in an intense harmony with its style. Fundamentally, in Jason's narrative, there is "...only one basic style, a sardonic furiousness expressed in rather conventional syntax and seemingly spoken aloud like a long aside to the audience at an Elizabethan play." (Stegner, 1965: 224) Among the three Compson brothers, Jason appears as the only one who is sane and has a routine life: he has a job, he has relationships with women, and though ineffectively, he appears to be in an effort to re-establish the prominence of his family. Thus, Jason can be regarded as the only Compson who is able to reconcile with the present state of the South. In this respect, it can be argued that Faulkner deliberately formed this section in the conventional narrative form: Jason's acceptance of the debased state of the South can be observed in the orderly state of his narrative. However, in order to depict the moral degradation Jason represents, Faulkner employs a tone and rhetoric of ultimate debasement. This is evident in the opening sentence of his section: "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say." (223) The salient feature of this section is the presentation of the events that represent the morally corrupt state of the Compson household in parallel with the debased language that Jason uses to convey them.

Throughout *April Sixth 1928*, there are examples of how Jason traps his own self by the schemes that he plans for his own benefit. He is deceived by the New York brokers, and he is robbed by his own niece. Such feeble attributes of Jason prove Faulkner's sardonic attitude to this character. Melvin Backman's following statements are a general account of Jason's section which includes its comparison with the narratives of Benjy, and Quentin, and the mood of sarcasm that dominates the section:

...the Jason section is dominated by the present, whereas the emotional life of Benjy and Quentin was dominated by the past. This section tells about both Jason and the family. The decline and fall of the House of Compson emerges definitely as the novel's subject. Of the three sons through whom Faulkner has told the story of the Compson family, Jason is the one to whom Faulkner is the most hostile. Although Jason may have been conceived out of hostility, his impact upon the reader is partly that of a comic character – a comic villain. After the morbidity and introversion of Quentin, the harsh wit and angry violence of Jason provide a sudden, welcome release through comedy. There is a double-edged humor in the rich sarcasm that flows naturally and easily out of Jason's permanent discontent, for he is both the maker and the butt of the satire. As his own anger, frustration, and frantic activity rise in tone and tempo, the comedy moves swiftly to its climax. When Jason finally fails in the pursuit of his money, earned as well as stolen, the comedy is complete. Some of Faulkner's finest comedy is found in this brilliant satire of Jason... (Backman, 1966: 29, 30)

The reason for Jason's obsession about Caddy is rather different from that of Benjy's and Quentin's. Because of Caddy's divorce from Herbert Head, Jason is never able to get the prestigious job at the bank. However, it is not possible for him to take revenge from Caddy since she is not present in the household. Therefore, "Jason seethes at Caddy through her daughter..." (Matthews, 1991: 70) His violent and deteriorated language becomes significant especially in his words about Miss Quentin. The fact that Quentin responds to his uncle in the same manner signals to the ultimate level of moral degeneration within the Compson household. The following dialogue between the uncle and niece exemplifies Faulkner's employment of the degraded rhetoric which is in parallel with the South's loss of its moral integrity:

"Now," I says, "I want to know what you mean, playing out of school and telling your grandmother lies and forging her name on your report and worrying her sick. What do you mean by it?"

...

"None of your damn business," she says. "You turn me loose."

...

"I want to know where you go when you play out of school," I says. "You keep off the streets, or I'd see you. Who do you play out with? Are you hiding out in the woods with one of those damn slick-headed jellybeans? Is that where you go?"

"You – you old goddamn!" she says. She fought, but I held her. "You damn old goddamn!" she says.

...

"You wait until I get this belt out and I'll show you," I says, pulling my belt out. (228, 229)

It is evident that Jason wants to get even with Caddy by treating her daughter in the worst way possible, and insulting her in the way he would like to have insulted Caddy. In other words, it can be argued that Jason uses “words as weapons” to get over his distress about Caddy. (Gray, 1996: 146)

Another point that should be analyzed is Faulkner’s use of the stream of consciousness technique in Jason’s section. Though, in this section, Faulkner makes a rare use of this technique, it becomes significant at the scenes in which Jason feels that he is losing his control over his family. When he sees Quentin with her red-tied boyfriend, Jason decides to follow them, but loses their track. Exactly at this point, the narrative slides into his memory flow:

I went on the street, but they were out of sight. And there I was, without any hat, looking like I was crazy too. Like a man would naturally think, one of them is crazy and another one drowned himself and the other one was turned out into the street by her husband, what’s the reason the rest of them are not crazy too. All the time I could see them watching me like a hawk, waiting for a chance to say Well I’m not surprised I expected it all the time the whole family’s crazy. Selling land to send him to Harvard and paying taxes to support a state University all the time that I never saw except twice at a baseball game and not letting her daughter’s name be spoken on the place until after a while Father wouldn’t even come downtown anymore but just sat there all day with the decanter I could see the bottom of his nightshirt and his bare legs and hear the decanter clinking until T.P. had to pour it for him and she says You have no respect for your father’s memory and I says I don’t know why not it sure is preserved well enough to last only if I’m crazy too God knows what I’ll do about it... (290)

In the light of the above quotation, it can be argued that Jason’s loss of the control of his language is in parallel with his loss of his family’s control. According to John T. Matthews, “...the periodic disruptions of his ungovernable family get reflected in the periodic disruptions of his syntax.” (Matthews, 1991: 112) As a result, along with the recurrent themes of moral corruption, all of the stylistic elements that Faulkner employs in *April Sixth 1928* hint at the inevitability of the end of the Compson line, and the collapse of the Southern aristocracy.

Despite Caddy’s lack of a section in order to speak for herself, she can be regarded as the most important figure in *The Sound and the Fury*. Benjy, Quentin, and Jason express their feelings through their experiences about the absence of Caddy, and “...as viewed through the eyes of her three brothers, each differently, she

becomes their fantasy figure.” (Karl, 1989: 328) However, it is the reader’s duty to combine the fragments of Caddy’s story, and to form his/her own image of her. Faulkner places Caddy in the center of the novel so skillfully that he forms the lives of the three Compson brothers through her absence. “Caddy seems, then, to be simultaneously absent and present; with her, Faulkner evokes an absent presence, or the absent center of the novel.” (Fowler, 1997: 32) As a result, the reader is able to formulate the story of Caddy and find out about her brothers synchronically. Through the figure of Caddy Compson, Faulkner is able to bring his “strategy of displacement” in effect, by making her “...the novel’s beginning, middle and end...” (Gray, 1996: 138, 139) It is through Caddy that the reader grasps the Compson brothers’ endless sense of displacement and deprivation.

The fourth and last section of the novel, *April Eighth 1928*, is written in the conventional narrative form, and it constitutes of multiplicity of tones and rhetoric. The reason for this is its quality of presenting an overall view of the whole novel. Donald M. Kartiganer states: “The fourth section is the voice of the traditional novelist, combining in moderation the qualities of the first three sections: objective in that it seems to tell us faithfully and credibly what happens, (our faith in Quentin and Jason is, of course, minimal), and at the same time interpretive but without obvious distortion.” (Minter, 1994: 329) After the three brothers’ presentation of their personal experiences, the reader is once more able to comprehend the tragedy that takes place within the Compson household. In other words, the more their mischance and failures are repeated, the more they become real for the reader. Thus, in this section, Faulkner’s employment of the theme of repetition brings in a new attribute to the formal aspects of *The Sound and the Fury*.

Benjy’s howling, Jason’s fury, and the dialectical language of the Gibsons comprise a considerable part of Dilsey’s section. However, it is the Biblical tone that dominates this section. Dilsey’s visit to the Easter Church Service apparently symbolizes the sense of order and faith that prevails her world. Correspondingly, after the discontinuous and incoherent narratives of the Compson brothers, Reverend Shegog’s use of language in the religious context creates an atmosphere of a return to the established norms. This sense of return can be perceived in terms of both the

established social order of the Southern aristocracy, and the use of the conventional narrative form.

It is noteworthy that in the closing of Shegog's sermon, there are significant references to Faulkner's concerns about the South. So once more, Faulkner has touched on his criticism of the South between the lines, and perhaps in a kind of concealment. The following quotation from Shegog's preaching can be set forth as an example for this:

“O blind sinner! Breddren, I tells you; sistuh, I says to you, when de Lawd did turn His mighty face, say, Aint gwine overload heaven! I can see de widowed God shet His do'; I sees dewhelmin flood roll between; I sees de darkness en de death everlasting upon de generations. Den lo! Breddren! Yes, breddren! Whut I see? Whut I see, O sinner? I sees de resurrection en de light; sees de meek Jesus sayin Dey kilt Me dat ye shall live again; I died dat dem whut sees en believes shall never die. Breddren, O breddren! I sees de doom crack en hears de golden horns shoutin down de glory, en de arisen dead whut got de blood en de ricklickshun [recollection] of de Lamb! (370)

The reference to the darkness and the death everlasting upon generations can be considered in relation with the endless curse of the South, and the resurrection and the light can be regarded as standing for Faulkner's futile hope of recovering the wounds of the Southern aristocracy. Nevertheless, none of his hopes reach a satisfactory conclusion. Faulkner never stated his criticism directly, and never offered a clear solution to overcome the ruination of the Southern aristocracy. His passivity in this sense can be observed thoroughly in the parallelism of the stylistic and thematic attributes of *The Sound and the Fury*.

Although there are different viewpoints that represent a variety of themes and events in this section, both Faulkner, as the authorial voice, and the whole of the novel still fail to say what they intend to say. Richard Gray explains this ironic situation as follows:

For once the closed circle of interiority is broken, the sense of the concrete world is firm, the sensory outlines of things finely and even harshly etched, the rhythms exact, evocative and sure. And yet, and yet... despite all that, the language is emphatically figurative, obsessively artificial; and the stress throughout is on appearance and impression, what *seems* to be the case rather than what is. We are still not being told the whole truth, the implication is, there remain limits to what we know; despite every effort, in fact, even this last section of the novel does not entirely succeed in naming Caddy. (...) in all four instances, the characters place a question mark over their attempts to

turn experience into speech by turning aside from naming, to seek deliverance and redress into a non-verbal world. (Gray, 1996: 147)

The novel's incomplete state about what it has to say corresponds to the theme of the failure of language. Despite the intensity of the memory flow of each of the characters, Faulkner does not express explicitly his view of the events, and he does not direct the reader in their process of forming his/her own viewpoint. Rather, through the aid of his stylistic devices, Faulkner prefers to hide his opinions between the lines in such a manner that only readers that are attentive enough can grasp what he actually wants to say.

In parallel with Faulkner's lack of drawing a conclusion, or setting forth a solution, the story of *The Sound and the Fury* does not end. This is because each section goes on repeating the same story (of Caddy), and none of them reach a satisfying conclusion. When the reader reaches the end of the novel, s/he feels a kind of ambiguity and vagueness. Walter J. Slatoff describes the feelings of the reader in this way:

We feel and are intended to feel ... that the events we have witnessed are at once tragic and futile, significant and meaningless. We cannot move beyond this. Nor does the final section help us to resolve whether the Compsons were defeated essentially by acts of choice or by some kind of doom, or whether the doom was chiefly a matter of fate or of psychological aberration or of socio-economic forces. (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 189)

In the last scene of the novel, Luster drives Benjy in the opposite direction of the routine that he is used to; as a result, Benjy begins to howl. Jason, who is extremely worried and angry about the disparagement of his family, immediately steps in, and turns the horse in the right direction. When Benjy begins to see the objects in their usual order, he hushes, and everything is "in its ordered place." (401) It is evident that Faulkner formed the last scene specially for it to be in perfect harmony with the whole of the novel. Apparently, for Faulkner, everything is fine as long as the established systems and hierarchies continue, and it is exactly the impossibility of replacing the old order of the South that define the ambiguity and discontinuity that prevails the style of *The Sound and the Fury*.

3.2. The Plurality of Voices in Re-evaluating the Southern History: *Absalom, Absalom!*

No way out, that is, except through the imagination: Faulkner's way of exorcizing the past – not just the Civil War past but the regional past as a whole – was to submit it to the powers of knowing re-creation. His solution to the sense of being encircled by voices from yesterday was to situate those voices in terms of a dialogic contact and conflict with the voices of today, and to make this engagement precisely his subject. He did not, of course, disencumber himself to past voices as a result: but, at least, he achieved the sort of imaginative liberation that could come from understanding and dramatizing them. He wrestled with his ghosts, in effect, in a way that showed he knew their measure and the nature of the wrestling match in which he was involved. (Gray, 1996: 24)

Absalom, Absalom! is regarded as one of Faulkner's masterpieces through which he displayed his stylistic artistry in the representation of the Southern history. Because of his intention of presenting only implications of his criticism of the sins of the South, Faulkner blurs the whole story of the novel through his intense employment of the theme of repetition. The reason for Faulkner's inclination of such a dreamlike presentation is his sense of delinquency about the unacceptable immorality and evil-doings that constitute the history of his hometown. Since he cannot undo history, Faulkner applies his own method of disrupting the realistic historical perspective entirely.

The most salient feature of the novel is the representation of the events in fragments. It is as if Faulkner deliberately puts the story out of its running order, and leaves it to the reader to combine the parts correctly. He guides the reader only by making constant repetitions of the previously presented information, with slight differences that s/he should not overlook. Faulkner's disintegrating the novel's entire order can also be explained by his desire of avoiding to form a moralizing voice. If he maintained the conventional narrative patterns, and presented the story in its proper sequence, *Absalom, Absalom!* would have been a novel of pure moral vision.

Faulkner makes use of various stylistic forms in order to accomplish his project of distracting the reader's mind. His employment of the Southern Gothic⁵⁰ can be accepted as one of these. As a result of the conservatism of the Southern

⁵⁰ The Southern Gothic is a sub-genre of the Gothic literary style. It is unique to American literature.

literary tradition, the focus of the events that occur in the novel is either one's familial relationships and the influence of community in his/her social and personal life, or the problematic issues of race, miscegenation, and incest. Correspondingly, unusual incidents which cover mysterious and/or ironic features become salient throughout the narrative. However, these features are not employed in order to create suspense. Instead, they serve for the exploration of the nature of the Old South, to which the characters which are typical of the region have a considerable contribution. Undoubtedly, slaves, and their relationships with their owners play a crucial role in the designation of the Gothic elements in the novel. Moreover, it is noteworthy that characters that are exceedingly flawed, such as Thomas Sutpen, are employed in order to demonstrate the undesirable facts about the South. However, Faulkner presents these characters in such a way that the reader feels sympathy and antipathy for them, simultaneously. He does this because while making the critique of his history, he cannot disregard the honorable features of his ancestors. With the combination of all the stated attributes, the Southern Gothic becomes the most suitable genre for Faulkner to depict the history of the South in *Absalom, Absalom!* Irwing Howe describes the effects of the Gothic style in the novel as follows:

Those effects [of the Gothic style] appear in numerous ways: the fearful doomed mansion, the "shadowy miasma" region, the driven and demonic hero, the melancholy victims of this hero's diabolism, the heavy overtones of decadence and vice. Unmistakably Gothic it is the juxtaposition of Sutpen, the *demon* or *ogre*, to his wife, the *broken butterfly* – unmistakable as a version of the sadistic fantasies that often inhabit Gothic novels. Still, the crux of the novel, if only because Faulkner is seldom concerned with horror for its own sake, is to be found not in these mildewed devices but in the history of the house of Sutpen, a house which stands for the element of sheer will – the urge to expansion and perpetuation – in the traditional Southern consciousness. (Howe, 1962: 72)

As a matter of fact, nearly all of the techniques that Faulkner employs in the novel are related to each other, as if progressing in a sequence and forming its whole structure. Faulkner's employment of multiple narrators can be regarded as the basis of the style of *Absalom, Absalom!* Miss Rosa and Quentin's father, Mr. Compson, can be regarded as the major tellers that reflect the story of Thomas Sutpen in completely different perspectives. The novel opens with Miss Rosa's version of the story, in which "...she pictures Sutpen as the incarnation of demonic energy, positing

horrendous crimes, “too dark to talk about,” as the cause of the disasters which have overtaken Sutpen and his kin.” (Hoffman, Vickery, 1960: 282) Such a presentation of Sutpen as “an ogre or a djinn” can be directly related to Faulkner’s application of the Southern Gothic. (23) Miss Rosa begins telling the story in a dusty, “dim hot airless room,” wearing her outfit of “eternal black” (7). Her rhetoric is totally compatible with the gothic style; thus, her narration is totally harmonious with her physical appearance. Richard Gray’s following statements describe the effect of the gothic elements in Rosa’s account:

The narrative she [Rosa] offers is undeniably gothic. There is the familiar, grim castle of gothic stories, a ‘private hell’ apparently reserved for ‘some desolation more profound than ruin.’ There also is the traditional villain, Sutpen, a perpetrator of horrible deeds on innocent victims: a man who, we are told, carried his second wife off to his ‘ogre-djin’ and subsequently permitted her, by means of infrequent visits to church, ‘to return, through the dispensation of one day only, to the world she had quitted’. Even the narrator as she recalls herself, and the rest of the family as she portrays them, are sucked into the atmosphere of gothic nightmare. (Gray, 1996: 215)

In fact, Miss Rosa’s fierce and cynical tone is a result of the life style she was made to adopt throughout her life. As the daughter of a conservative merchant, she was raised according to the norms of Puritan uprightness. As a person who has internalized specific moral patterns as a result of being restricted from learning alternative perspectives and life styles, Rosa’s conception of Sutpen as a villain is not surprising. Richard Gray goes on his words by portraying Rosa’s reasons for perceiving Sutpen as the destructive force upon her family, and in a broader sense, the South:

...the Gothicism of Rosa’s account must, however, be seen for what it is: the product of certain, very specific emotional and historical pressures. Sutpen is perceived as a gothic villain, and the story in which that villain is inserted becomes an assault on patriarchal power, precisely because of what Rosa sees as her own betrayal and the betrayal of the South – a land marked for retribution, according to her, by ‘men with valour and strength but without pity or honour’. (Gray, 1996: 215)

Another aspect of the above quotation is Faulkner’s absorption of his criticism into the narrative of the novel. Apparently, for Miss Rosa, the reason of the destruction of the Old South is the men who lack ‘pity or honour.’ Thus, it can be argued that

Faulkner conveys his own criticism of the Southern man through Miss Rosa's furious and regretful state about the collapse of her hometown.

The substance of Mr. Compson's version of Sutpen's story is completely the opposite of Miss Rosa's. The main reason for this is the objectivity of his narrative in comparison with Miss Rosa's extremely subjective account. What makes Mr. Compson's version more reliable is the sense of detachment that he creates in his style. Moreover, Faulkner's elimination of quotation marks throughout Mr. Compson's narration makes his version appear as a historical document. In his view, Sutpen was a passionate and ambitious man whose unflinching will and courage can be accepted as admirable. Despite the relief Mr. Compson offers at first sight, the reflections of his cynicism and fatalism become apparent in the continuance of his version of Sutpen's story. Such attributes of Mr. Compson can be regarded as the perfect means for Faulkner to imply his pessimistic view of the South's present state. Mr. Compson's following statements about black women slaves can be regarded as Faulkner's acknowledgement of the South's guilt about the system of slavery:

Not whores. And not whores because of us, the thousand. We – the thousand, even made the laws which declare that one eighth of a specified kind of blood shall outweigh seven eighths of another kind. I admit that. But that same white race would have made them slaves too, laborers, cooks, maybe even field hands, if it were not for this thousand, these few men like myself without principles or honor either, perhaps you will say. We cannot, perhaps we do not even want to, save all of them; perhaps the thousand we save are not one in a thousand. But we save that one [Charles Bon's octoroon mistress]. God may mark every sparrow, but we do not pretend to be God, you see. Perhaps we do not even want to be God, since no man would want but one of these sparrows. And perhaps when God looks into one of these establishments [houses of mistresses] like you [Henry] saw tonight, He would not choose one of us to be God either... (115)

Apart from its quality of being a self-criticism of Faulkner, the above quotation can be accepted as one of the best passages that exemplify his intention of confusing and distracting the reader's mind. The statements in the quotation are in fact a product of Mr. Compson's guesswork about Charles Bon's remarks on black women during his visit to the house of his mistress with Henry. Firstly, it is significant that the reader is presented with Charles Bon's putative remarks through a multi-phased narration. This circuitous style of presentation reduces the credibility of the facts that are put forward. Consequently, the reader can never be sure about the

truthfulness of the events s/he is reading about the history of the South. Secondly, if the above statements are truly uttered by Bon himself, an ironic situation occurs. The fact that Charles Bon, a half black man, refers to himself as the one of the people who has made laws about the black people can be regarded as exceedingly interesting. In this respect, the above quotation obviously becomes a sequence of statements through which Faulkner speaks for himself. Thirdly, and perhaps the most important of all, the passage can be accepted as an example of Faulkner's absorption of the theme of race into the technique he adopts. Frederick R. Karl describes Faulkner's concealment of the crucial information that designates the dishonorable state of the South as such:

...while *Absalom* moves on several levels – social, historical, and personal – it comes at race through secret passageways, by means of hiding necessary information and by using divulgence as a psychological weapon. As a detective story of sorts, it is also a tone poem, employing colors and shadings as a vehicle for thematic material; this is for Faulkner a way of both presenting and commenting on race. What we must consider is not the obvious point that racial matters are the stuff in this novel, but that such matters are buried in dark rooms, attics, enclosures, and most of all in words. To extrapolate race we must extract virtually the entire metaphorical meaning of the novel. In one sense, we can say race *has been absorbed into technique*. (Karl, 1989: 550)

A further function of Mr. Compson's presence as a narrator in the novel is to prove Faulkner's conception of the precariousness of historical facts. According to Hortense J. Spillers, the theme of knowledge as misperception serves for Faulkner's project of designating the unstable nature of what is presented as a historical fact. This is evident in her following remarks:

...the novel stages the problem of knowledge as a fiction and seems to decide that the former (at least what often passes for it) is riddled with instability; insofar as it is often concatenated from the imperfections of information, iron-clad conviction,... and the built-up authority of the duplicative paradigm, it is a phantasmal tissue of misperception, passed on an embellished from one generation of actors to the next, as though it were gospel... (Spillers, 2003: 351)

The narration of Mr. Compson can be set forth as exemplifying the above statements of Spillers. Although he appears as the most reliable narrator in *Absalom, Absalom!*, his misguidance of the reader becomes clear as the novel progresses. Mr. Compson explains Henry's unwillingness to let Bon marry Judith through his incapability of

acknowledging the mistress whom he had been living with in New Orleans. However, in the Old South, a white man's extra-marital relationship with a black woman was a common experience. In this regard, Mr. Compson's commentary is not satisfactory. Moreover, at this point, his paradoxical explanation raises doubts about the credibility of his version of Sutpen's story. The reader learns in the later chapters that the real reason of the conflict between Henry and Bon is the latter's trace of black blood. Thus, Faulkner himself refutes the background he had prepared in order to create a sense of objectivity in Mr. Compson's style. The approach of detachment and the elimination of quotation marks prove to be Faulkner's stylistic devices which he employs in order to create the effect of vagueness in the reader's mind. As a result, through the questionability of Mr. Compson's account, Faulkner proves that there is no truly objective history, and that there can be radical differences depending upon the presenters of historical facts.

The narration of Quentin Compson can be analyzed in various contexts. It should not be disregarded that Quentin formed his version through the ones he heard from Miss Rosa and his father. Thus, Quentin's vision of the Sutpen saga can be accepted as a combination of the flawed narratives of Mr. Compson, and Miss Rosa. Because of this, Quentin suffers from the tension that is the result of his absorption of these two opposing views about the story of Sutpen, and the facts about the history of the South. Richard Gray describes Quentin's despair and the attributes it brings in to his version in this way:

...Quentin is drawn in several different directions at once. He is, in the first instance, torn between different versions of the past, the parameters of which are marked by the opposing narratives of Rosa Coldfield and Mr. Compson. And, in second, he suffers an extreme case of the temptations confronting anyone who attempts to recall and represent earlier times: the temptations, that is, of identity or difference – the urge either blankly to identify with the people or events of yesterday or, alternatively, to see the intervening accumulations of history as an impenetrable barrier walling one off from an age now gone. Quentin has '*heard too much*' and absorbed too much because of what seems sometimes like an infinite process of documentation: a sea of voices – 'mouth to mouth tales', letters and rumours – over which the story of Thomas Sutpen has had to pass to reach him. These previous textualizations, which effectively constitute the story for him, have to be engaged with if he is ever to understand that story in its historical specificity and strangeness. And yet they also threaten him with intellectual impotence: the failure to see and achieve contacts with people who are his precursors and determinants – in whom, as his father would put it, he lay dormant and

waiting – and the consequent failure to see and understand his own times and himself, his present conditions and his subjectivity. (Gray, 1996: 218)

Apparently, placing Quentin's narration as the last one in the novel was a part of Faulkner's project in depicting the instability, precariousness, and deceitfulness of the nature of historical facts. By combining all of the data he was presented by Miss Rosa and his father, Quentin appears to be in a process of exploration and re-evaluation of the truth about the history of his hometown. However, the fact that he cannot reach any satisfactory conclusion at the end of the novel proves the impossibility of the resurrection of the South through the insurmountable doubtfulness of what is known as the truth about a whole region's history.

The presence of Shreve, who has been raised in the completely different culture of Canada, brings in a completely different characteristic to the act of narration in *Absalom, Absalom!* In fact, an analysis of Quentin's narration independent of Shreve's contributions is almost impossible. Because of the South's exceedingly authentic nature for Shreve, he willingly and enthusiastically plays an active role in the re-evaluation of Sutpen's story. As their account of the story progresses, Shreve takes over the act of narrating, and at times it becomes very difficult to identify whether Shreve or Quentin is telling the story. Such a confusing presentation is a part of both Faulkner's aim of blurring the story, and providing the reader an intense sensation of the events that took place in the history of the Old South. The following quotation from the novel describes their act of narrating in relation with the vagueness of everything they mention:

They stared – glared – glared at one another. It was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps have never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least, to Shreve) shades too, quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporizing breath. (303)

The above quotation can be accepted as a portrayal of the crucial aspects of the association of Quentin and Shreve. Firstly, the two young men become one because they are both exceedingly immersed in the story. Faulkner deliberately blurs the identity of the narrator in order to make his depiction more confusing. In this way, the reader almost loses track of the subject that is being mentioned, and Faulkner realizes his project of maintaining the vagueness of the sins of the South. Despite the confusion it creates, Faulkner's treatment of the two young men as one personality creates a stronger feeling of empathy on the reader, and the result of this is exactly a feeling of sympathy for everyone and everything that takes place in the novel. In other words, the reader is drawn to the single consciousness forged by all the characters. Secondly, Faulkner indicates that the difference between Shreve and Quentin can be noticed by their 'usage of words.' This is especially significant in Shreve's reference to Rosa Coldfield as "Aunt Rosa," and Quentin's insistent correction as "Miss Rosa." (176) Apparently, Shreve's conception of Rosa Coldfield is of an old dame who can be referred to as 'aunt' because of the intimacy one might feel to a woman who is about the age of a grandmother. However, for Quentin, the words he uses in his reference to a Southern gentlewoman are crucial. Because of the manners of the Southern aristocracy that he has internalized, Quentin's notion of Rosa can never transcend the image of a Southern lady who should be mentioned with respect, by keeping the necessary distance.

The intertwinement of present and past is another attribute of *Absalom, Absalom!* that attracts attention in the narration of Quentin and Shreve. The following quotation demonstrates how Faulkner fuses all of the characters and events that he has created:

Shreve ceased again. It was just as well, since he had no listener. Perhaps he was aware of it. Then suddenly he had no talker either, though possibly he was not aware of this. Because now neither of them were there. They were both in Carolina and the time was forty-six years ago, and it was not even four now [Quentin, Shreve, Henry, Bon] 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 *bivouac fires burning in a pine grove, the gaunt and ragged men sitting or lying about them, talking not about the war yet all curiously enough (or perhaps not curiously at all) facing the South where further on in the darkness the pickets stood – the pickets who, watching to the South, could see the flicker and*

gleam of the Federal bivouac fires myriad and faint and encircling half the horizon and counting ten fire for each Confederate one... (351)

Faulkner brings together the four young men from completely different time zones and places and circumstances into the narrative of the novel. Immediately after he has noted that the four have become one, he shifts into the years of the Civil War, and indicates this through his use of italics. Obviously, he wants to designate that the South is still being haunted by the Civil War, even after forty-six years. A further instance for this is Faulkner's interweaving of the scenes in which Henry learns about Bon's trace of black blood, and Clytie's setting the house on fire⁵¹. This is an implication of the impossibility of the South to overcome the problem of race. Henry learns that Bon is part black in 1864, and Clytie burns down the house in 1910. Faulkner's juxtaposition of these two scenes point at a crucial conclusion about his hometown: it was its sins about slavery that rendered the collapse of the Southern aristocracy inevitable. Consequently, it is obvious that Faulkner has absorbed the unforgivable guilt of the South into the style of his narrative.

Another aspect that should be noted about the version of Quentin and Shreve is the fact that it almost entirely constitutes of conjectures. This can be related to the fact that "...not a single one of the characters in *Absalom* "saw" anything." (Spillers, 2003: 350) Therefore, it is natural that there are many gaps in the story that Quentin knows. In this respect, the two friends make a re-evaluation of the story of Sutpen by filling those gaps with their guesswork. However, they exaggerate their use of imagination and add unreal figures to the story of Sutpen, and form their version depending upon them. As a result, the reader's primary expectation of being able to read a complete and absolutely true version of the Sutpen saga turns out to be a disillusion.

On the whole, it can be argued that Thomas Sutpen is the center of the novel through which Faulkner executes his stylistic devices. Because of his nature of representing both the heroism and disgrace of the South, Faulkner makes Sutpen the focus of every event that takes place in the novel. However, despite the centrality

⁵¹ These two scenes take place between pages 346-351 in the 1964 version of *Absalom, Absalom!* which is published by Random House, Inc.

Faulkner attributes to Sutpen, he presents the most important facts about him in complete indefiniteness. The scene in which Wash Jones kills him can be set forth as an example. The only thing we know about Sutpen's death is that he was killed by a rusty scythe. In fact, it is as if Faulkner applies this method especially in the death scenes of his characters. He presents the deaths of Henry, Clytie, and Miss Rosa as if they were trivial incidents that took place in the Sutpen saga. Over against Faulkner's detached manner to his major characters, the fact that he analyzes the scene in which Sutpen chases the architect⁵² in detail is noteworthy. The reason for Faulkner's constant digressions from the major concerns, and his insistent emphasis on the less important ones can be explained by his desire to maintain the vagueness of the story, which can also be related to the quality of his rendition through indirections. According to Irving Howe, the complexity of the novel's style is a consequence of the complex nature of its central character. This is evident in his following statements:

Sutpen cannot be grasped through a single apprehension; he must be reached through ambush and obstacle, confusion and delay. Only gradually do we accustom ourselves to a man who is large and grand in his evil, and from this complexity in his character follows the technique of the novel. Suspensions of incident, apparent mystifications, calculated affronts to continuity – all are used in behalf of Faulkner's executive purpose. (Howe, 1962: 223, 224)

Therefore, it can be argued that Faulkner places Sutpen in the center of the novel, and charges him with the duty of unifying the de-centered narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!* In this respect, the function of Sutpen can be compared to Caddy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*. The fact that both of these central characters are the epitomes of the moral degradation of the South should not be disregarded.

Repeating the importance of the act of narration in the novel, it can be argued that it is the personal experiences and obsessions of the narrators that shape the novel's structure. Unaware of the effect they create upon the narrative through their subjectivity, each of them points at crucial details of the Sutpen saga that the other ones ignore or overlook. Notwithstanding, all of the narrators in the novel are doomed to an eternal recollection and re-evaluation of the tragedy that took place on

⁵² Sutpen kidnaps an architect in order to make him build a glamorous house. The architect builds the house he wants, and then runs away.

their native land and how it affected their lives. What is noteworthy is the style Faulkner adopts in the depiction of how the past and the present are inter-related in the human mind. The following quotation from the novel can be accepted as exemplifying this:

Maybe nothing ever happens and once is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm... (261)

The above quotation can indeed be a reference to the whole of the novel: a drop falls into a pool of water, and raises other ripples that move towards another connected pool. That is, in the process of reading, it obliges the reader to make out different conclusions, and follow a different path each time the major teller changes. Through such a challenging rendition of the history of the South, Faulkner points at the fact that there is no such thing as absolute truth. This is why, in the novel, there are innumerable gaps, and innumerable conjectures to fill them with. Serving perfectly for the project of their creator, Faulkner's characters will never stop recalling and re-evaluating the Sutpen saga, which can be regarded as the epitome of the Southern history.

Clearly, the innumerable repetitions of the events from multiple points of view and intricate stylistic devices are far from clarifying the narrative of the novels. Additionally, they blur the tragic experience of the Old South and make it ambiguous. Thus, the futile hope of recovering the devastation of the aristocratic tradition and the long-established hierarchies are perpetuated in the fiction of William Faulkner. In this way, while reading his fiction, the reader is exposed to the indefinite state of the past, the present, and the future of the South.

Conclusion

Starting with the analysis of the moral degradation in the post-Civil War Southern community, the scope of this study has been a representation of the parallelisms in the content and style of William Faulkner's fiction. In the illustration of the powerful relation of the themes and formal aspects in his works, two of his novels, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* have been examined. In the analysis of these novels, the special emphasis is given on the relation between the story and the way it is told.

Initially, the reasons of Faulkner's commitment to the South have been presented. His devotion to his hometown resulted in his creation of a fictional world in which he depicted the tragedy of the region according to his own appreciation. The inhabitants of the world of William Faulkner range from noble aristocrats to morally and intellectually debased and poverty-stricken families. Whatever their financial status is, all of the members of his world suffer from the devastation of the South's integrity in terms of morality and wealth.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, the emotional deprivation of the self and the moral corruption of the Southern community are depicted through the ethical disintegration of the Compsons, a pre-Civil War aristocratic family. The characters that are employed in the novel represent the fatalism, self-absorption, obsessiveness, lack of purity, and the immoral materialism that prevail the post-Civil War South. Yet, the Negro servant of the house is ironically placed in the position of a force of resurrection, which signals at the impossibility of the re-integration of the South's moral center.

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the moral decline of the South is presented as a historical story. The rise and fall of the novel's central character, Thomas Sutpen, is set forth as the epitome of Southern history. The significance of the novel derives from Faulkner's desire of depicting his notion of the doubtfulness of historical documents. By employing multiple perspectives in the presentation of the story, he designates how strikingly historical facts can change depending upon the person who is disclosing it.

The themes that connote the South's lack of a moral center are depicted through the brutal and exceedingly passionate nature of Thomas Sutpen. He represents the region's dishonor with his disregard of all the ethical values that a Southern gentleman should possess. This is a result of his obsession about acquiring a notable status among the members of the Southern aristocracy. The concepts of incest, miscegenation, fratricide, and the tragic experiences of racial discrimination and slavery are the dominant themes that Faulkner employs in his rendition of the history of his hometown. Moreover, by forming *Absalom, Absalom!* in two different time zones that are about forty years apart, Faulkner designates the eternalness of the Southerners' despair. The re-evaluation of the Southern history by Quentin Compson and his roommate Shreve in the year 1909 hints at the incorrigibility of the experience of being haunted by the hard facts about the region.

The stylistic devices that Faulkner makes use of in his depiction of the downfall of the Old South are in parallel with the themes of both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Basically, his employment of flawed characters enables a more profound rendition of the tragic experiences that they undergo. Their psychologically weak nature enables Faulkner an intense use of modernist literary techniques that empower the emotional effect of the novel. Fragmentation, repetition, interior monologues and the disruption of chronology are the salient methods that constitute Faulkner's fiction.

The intense use of fragmentation and repetition serve for Faulkner's intention of designating the displacement and dissolution of the self. Additionally, such devices have a considerable effect on the distraction of the readers' attention. This provides the Faulkner reader with a vague image of the disreputable events that can be considered the sins of the South. Indeed, Faulkner realizes his project of hiding the themes of moral decay between the lines of the narratives of both of the novels.

Interior monologues and the disruption of chronology function in two main ways: the intertwinement of the present and the past, and Faulkner's desire of avoiding a moralizing voice in his fiction. Within their flow of memory, the characters' minds shift from one scene to another, between the present and the past. This kind of a shift in time results in the disruption of the chronologies of both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* In this regard, Faulkner leaves the

combination of the presented data to the reader, and makes him/her draw his/her own conclusions about the history of the South.

A notable fact about Faulkner's novels is their lack of resolving the tensions that are presented as the major issues of the Southern region. However, it is significant that his works appear to have been formed with an intention of avoiding every kind of resolution. The endings of both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* hint at the meaninglessness of the efforts for a reconciliation with the past and present. This also connotes the futility of making re-evaluations of the Southern history through the act of reading. Faulkner ends both of the novels in such a way that he makes his readers share the despair of his characters.

In the final analysis, it can be stated that Faulkner depicted the South's "...lost dream, its lingering guilt, its terrible lies, and its exploitation of people as well as land..." through his employment of stylistic devices that render the act of reading a challenging process. (Minter, 1996: 227) The difficulty of accepting the terrible facts about his hometown made Faulkner adopt such an intense style that is in parallel with the severity of the problematic issues that are put forward. In this respect, *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* portray the moral downfall of the Southern aristocracy through Faulkner's awareness of the impact of the form upon the content.

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