MÁRCIA LAPPE ALVES

EXPERIENCE / EXPERIMENTATION: FAULKNER AS A STORYTELLER

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EXPERIENCE / EXPERIMENTATION: FAULKNER AS A STORYTELLER

MESTRANDA: PROFª. MÁRCIA LAPPE ALVES

ORIENTADORA: PROFª. DRª. RITA TEREZINHA SCHMIDT

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PORTO ALEGRE
2010

Para o meu pai,
com amor e saudade.

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“Yesterday today and tomorrow are Is: Indivisible: One”.

William Faulkner

RESUMO

Esta dissertação focaliza dois textos do escritor William Faulkner, considerado pela crítica como um dos expoentes das experimentações modernistas. O primeiro a ser estudado aqui é *A Rose for Emily*, uma *short story* publicada em 1930; o segundo é *Absalom, Absalom!*, um romance de 1936. O objetivo é investigar se no trabalho de Faulkner pode ser encontrado um narrador por excelência, partindo do conceito apresentado por Walter Benjamin em seu estudo *The storyteller: reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov*. Minha proposta é levantar a questão do fim da comunicabilidade da experiência do narrador para então sugerir que, ao contrário do que Benjamin afirma, a arte de narrar não chegou ao fim. Meu argumento é de que as narrativas de Faulkner evidenciam sua arte de narrar imbricada com seu uso de ponto de vista. A experiência e a experimentação de Faulkner enquanto escritor são investigadas neste trabalho, principalmente sua manipulação do uso de ponto de vista, e são analisadas à luz de conceitos desenvolvidos por Walter Benjamin, Wayne Booth, Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, entre outros. Os resultados desta pesquisa destacam que o trabalho de Faulkner com ponto de vista pode ser considerado muito mais que um mero experimento modernista, pois sua experiência como escritor proveniente do Sul dos Estados Unidos tem impacto nessa experimentação. A memória individual e coletiva, a transmissão de experiência, o contar e o recontar de histórias dos narradores, são fatores importantes para a construção de significado nas narrativas estudadas. Além disso, ao discutir a significação de sua obra, tanto no aspecto formal quanto no aspecto relativo ao contexto geográfico e literário de seu tempo e lugar, espero contribuir com mais um olhar sobre as estratégias narrativas de Faulkner, escritor que, ainda hoje, fomenta investigação e produção acadêmica significativa, justamente por conseguir construir círculos narrativos que apresentam narradores por excelência.

Palavras-chave: William Faulkner; *A Rose for Emily*; *Absalom, Absalom!*; narrador; ponto de vista; modernismo sulista.

ABSTRACT

This thesis brings into focus two texts by William Faulkner, a writer who has been praised as one of the exponents at modernist experimentations. The first one to be studied here is *A Rose for Emily*, a short story published in 1930; the second is *Absalom, Absalom!*, a novel from 1936. The objective is to investigate whether a genuine storyteller can be found in Faulkner's work, supported by the concept presented by Walter Benjamin in his essay *The storyteller: reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov*. My aim is to raise the question of the end of communicability of experience in order to suggest that, contrary to what Benjamin affirms, the art of storytelling has not reached its end. My argument is that Faulkner's narratives evidence his storytelling art as being imbricated with his use of point of view. Faulkner's experience and experimentation as a writer are investigated here, principally his manipulation with the use of point of view, and they are analyzed in the light of the concepts developed by Walter Benjamin, Wayne Booth, Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, and others. The results of this research highlight that Faulkner's work with point of view is to be considered much more than merely a modernist experimentation, because his experience as a writer from the South of the United States has impact on this experimentation. Individual and collective memory, transmission of experience, narrators telling and retelling stories, are important factors for the construction of meaning in the narratives studied here. Moreover, by discussing the meaningfulness of his work, whether in its formal aspect or in the aspect related to the geographic and literary context of its time and place, I expect to contribute with yet another look into the narrative strategies employed by Faulkner, a writer that, still today, fosters academic investigation and production, exactly for being able to construct telling circles that present genuine storytellers.

Palavras-chave: William Faulkner; *A Rose for Emily*; *Absalom, Absalom!*; storyteller; point of view; Southern modernism.

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INTRODUCTION

My study of William Faulkner began in my undergraduate years[1] with a puzzling but exhilarating reading of *A Rose for Emily*. I was introduced to Faulkner's short story at a time when I was also learning about other great American writers, such as Edgar Allan Poe and Ernest Hemingway. Here is one of the passages that intrigued me, and left me wondering about the importance of the angle of vision,

> Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows – she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house – like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 128)

By then, I did not have the slightest idea of what focalization was. Furthermore, I considered point of view simply as an opinion about something; even so, the direction of that "carven torso of an idol in a niche" look puzzled me somehow. That is an excerpt from the very first work that I read by William Faulkner, which I consider to have been a turning point in my career. I know it is going to sound nostalgic, but here it goes: I was an undergraduate student then, majoring in English, Portuguese, and related Literatures. Due to my experience as an ESL teacher, I had almost decided that I would do my final paper at the university on ESL teaching, maybe in reading research. Still indecisive, I turned to my professors for advice.

One of them, who later became my advisor, reminded me to choose a topic that intrigued me, something that would really trigger my curiosity and enhance my research. Then I realized I should write about Literature, and Literature in English. During that

[1] My undergraduate studies were conducted at Centro Universitário La Salle (Unilasalle) in Canoas from 2002 to 2007.

semester, I signed up for an American Literature class. That was when I came across *A Rose for Emily*, a short story by William Faulkner that made an indelible impression on me. Just like the words from the excerpt mentioned earlier, when I read Faulkner it really becomes a challenge to control my gaze. I also cannot tell for sure who is looking or who is being watched. His narrative control, skillfully foreshadowing or withholding information so that I would be surprised, triggered my curiosity mainly because I considered myself an experienced reader.

I am aware that scientific commitment and personal feelings should not interfere with the study and the analysis of a given topic. However, I must confess that Faulkner's text really moved me as a reader. And that is why it eventually became the object of study for my final undergraduate paper: the question of point of view in William Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*. Moreover, my fascination with Faulkner's work only grew stronger and I decided to continue researching.

This research became possible at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, writing this thesis on Faulkner. Fortunately, my project was accepted. There was even a seminar on some of Faulkner's novels at this university in 2008, and I was thrilled to learn so much more about his longer works there. These discussions with professors and fellow graduate students broadened my horizons, especially regarding the complex construction of Faulkner's work.

Let me go over some issues related to the matter of the title: *Experience / Experimentation: Faulkner as a storyteller*. Reading Faulkner is a major experience for any reader; it is an event to which I humbly refer to as *the Faulkner experience*, due to its complexity and peculiarity. But that is not my main concern here. In fact, the argument I am going to make is that Faulkner is able to bring together his experience to the construction of his stories, where we see the individual experience of his characters turn into collective experience as the story unfolds.

More specifically, I refer to Faulkner's experience as the knowledge and skill that he has gained through writing and the very process of obtaining it. And here is where experimentation comes into play, for he achieved great results by experimenting with form. An experiment in something is a new activity, idea or method in which you try to see what happens or what effect occurs. So, experimentation is the activity or process of carrying out a scientific experiment or experiments. Thus, I see Faulkner experimenting with narrative techniques in order to complement his experience.

One of the main characteristics of Faulkner's experimentation as a writer lies in his handling of point of view. The issue of point of view is worthy of study, mainly because of

the confusion that still exists concerning the definitions of narrator and point of view. Further research on this narrative element would contribute to a better understanding of its influence on the construction of meaning in the narrative.

Arguing towards a new stage in the discussion of Faulkner's experimentation with point of view, I am going to analyze the way his experience as a writer from the South of The United States influences his efforts as a storyteller. My proposal raises the argument present in Walter Benjamin's essay *The storyteller* that there are no more storytellers. Contrary to that, my argument is that Faulkner's art of storytelling is imbricated with his handling of point of view. Is his innovative handling of point of view a result of his experience in his short stories as it is in most of his novels? How does his use of point of view influence the construction of meaning in the narrative?

Is it possible that Faulkner is a genuine storyteller according to the terms presented and discussed by Walter Benjamin in his essay *The storyteller: reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov*, even though he is considered a major figure in the modernist novel scene because of his experimentations with point of view? Could Faulkner's use of point of view be considered more than merely a modernist experiment? Does his Southern experience have any impact in that experimentation? One of the first characteristics praised by Benjamin is the ability to turn individual experience into collective experience and then into another unique individual experience again. For him, this cycle, rather recycle, of material is impossible to happen with the work of a modern novelist. I propose that William Faulkner is a great novelist, because he is a great storyteller. While Leskov is called by Benjamin one of the last great storytellers, I would like to show evidences that Faulkner[2] is also a great storyteller.

The analysis I intend to carry out here is to investigate whether Faulkner can be considered a genuine storyteller, even though he is considered a modernist novelist. In order to do that, I begin with the study of Benjamin's notion of storyteller. Then I disclaim his assumptions regarding the end of the communicability of experience by the storyteller, arguing that Faulkner's narratives evidence both a novelist as well as a storyteller at work. His experience and experimentation as a writer will be investigated, mainly in terms of his

[2] It is significant to say that William Faulkner was born in New Albany, Mississippi, on September 25, 1897. His first book, *The Marble Faun*, a collection of poems, was published in 1924. However, he is most highly regarded for his novels, such as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), *The Unvanquished* (1938), *The Hamlet* (1940), *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), *A Fable* (1954), *The Town* (1957), *The Mansion* (1959), and *The Reivers* (1962). He also wrote several volumes of short stories, as well as collections of poems and essays. In 1949, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, when he delivered an inspiring speech that is included in the appendix to this thesis. For *A Fable* and *The Reivers* he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. William Faulkner passed away in Bylahia, Mississippi, on July 6, 1962.

handling of point of view in two narratives, the novel *Absalom, Absalom!*, and the short story *A Rose for Emily*. I think this study can contribute to the appreciation of Faulkner's overall career as a writer of narrative; not only Faulkner the Nobel Prize novelist, but also Faulkner the short story writer.

The corpus of this study consists of two works written by the American author in the first half of the twentieth century. The first is *A Rose for Emily*, a short story published in 1930; the second is *Absalom, Absalom!*, a novel published in 1936. The notions of experimentation and experience are going to be dealt with in the light of notions about narrative developed by Walter Benjamin, and scholars such as Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, and Wayne Booth.

The creative use of point of view is one of the characteristics of modernist literature; hence texts from this period were selected for this study. The author, William Faulkner, was one of the American exponents who experimented with point of view. A lot of research has been done on his novels, but it has been evidenced that there has been little investigation about point of view in his short stories[3]. My intention is to offer an overview on Faulkner's modernism and experimentalism based on major critical works in order to help verify whether his novel experimentation in form is maintained in his short story.

The initial idea for this thesis was to analyze short stories commenting briefly on Faulkner's former novels, but as the work advanced, I realized it would be incomplete to offer an analysis of this complex work without highlighting its relations with at least some of the rest of Faulkner's production. That is the reason it became necessary to analyze in the third chapter not only the short story *A Rose for Emily*, but also *Absalom, Absalom!*, a novel from 1936. William Faulkner's short story will be examined in this thesis, but incorporating the significance of his novels, particularly *Absalom, Absalom!*, to his storytelling force is essential.

I decided to bring *Absalom, Absalom!* to the discussion because of its complex structure and its manner of telling. After I read Brooks' essay *History and the Sense of the Tragic: Absalom, Absalom!*, where he affirms that it is "the greatest of Faulkner's novels, [but it] is probably the least well understood of all his books" (p. 186), I decided to investigate its

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[3] Edmond L. Volpe claims in the preface to his *A reader's guide to William Faulkner: the short stories* (2004) that his work would have been the first full-length study of the short stories to be published if it had been delivered to Farrar, Straus when it was due (1984). Since then, discussions of the short stories have been included in the major biographies by Joseph Blotner, David Minter, and Frederick Karl, as well as important general critical studies such as *The Achievement of William Faulkner* by Michael Millgate. Still, "the number of full-length studies of the short fiction remains very limited, especially in comparison with the flood of works dealing with the novels" (VOLPE, p. viii) of William Faulkner.

storytelling properties in the light of Benjamin's essay on the genuine storyteller. This means that *Absalom, Absalom!* can be regarded as a representative example of the sophistication in storytelling and communicability of experience. I intend to examine the use of point of view in the novel and in the short story *A Rose for Emily* as well. But that is an analysis for the third chapter, only after the reviewing of concepts about point of view that appears in the second chapter of this study.

At the beginning of my graduate studies I wanted to study Faulkner's short stories. Even though he is a Nobel Prize winning American writer who is mostly known for his novels, his shorter works are also rich in many aspects. But that first project underwent changes, and I see that this discussion will benefit more from the study of one novel and one short story, rather than just focusing on some short stories, which are mainly preliminary laboratories.

Among Faulkner's nineteen novels, fifteen were written in the period from the late 1920s to the early 1940s. Most of his short stories were also composed during this productive period. The short story selected for this study was first published in a magazine, according to the date previously mentioned here. But later, in his *Collected Stories* (1950), Faulkner grouped it with others and organized forty-two stories into six groupings, based on geographical elements: *The Country*, *The Village*, *The Wilderness*, *The Wasteland*, *The Middle Ground*, and *Beyond*. First published by Random House in 1950, the volume I consulted[4] for this study is a Vintage International Edition from November 1995.

When refering to *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, Edmond Volpe argues that Faulkner "sought to establish a unity in the volume" (VOLPE, 2004, p. 3) just like he had done in his first collection of short stories *These Thirteen* (1931), where, according to Michael Millgate (1966), the thirteen stories are grouped under three untitled sections by geography and subject matter. Thus, it is possible to see that, for Faulkner, the setting of the fiction was of major importance.

The structure of this thesis consists of three chapters: the first discusses Faulkner's position in relation to storytelling; the second chapter reviews different theoretical concepts on point of view; the third chapter focuses on the analysis of Faulkner's narratives and his experimentations with perspective, in order to verify to what extent Faulkner is a modernist

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[4] As a matter of fact, I have done some traveling in order to check if my 1995 edition was true to the first one from 1950. No modifications were made for the 1995 edition, so it remains the same book Faulkner himself designed. Since I was not able to go to the Special Collection Area of the University of Mississippi Library, I was glad when I found one volume from 1950 right here in Brazil, at Florestan Fernandes Library (FFLCH-USP).

with a difference. Also, this chapter offers my close-reading of the objects of study, as an effort to demonstrate how some topics can address the influence and importance of point of view to the construction of meaning in a story.

In the first chapter, Walter Benjamin's essay *The storyteller: reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov* (1936) is the starting point for the discussion about Faulkner as a storyteller. Much of Faulkner's work addresses the life in the Deep South[5], particularly in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, which is the setting for several of his novels and some of his short stories. I want to prove that in the work of a novelist, the storyteller is alive. Therefore I intend to disclaim Benjamin's premise that the communicability of experience is over. I claim that Faulkner is a genuine storyteller in the light of Benjamin's essay, even though in the modernist tradition.

Some of the questions to be posed here, and which I will attempt to answer, are related to Faulkner's experimentation with point of view. That is why I review different concepts on point of view in literature in the second chapter of this study. Not only is point of view an essential element in narrative, but it has also been the center of much heated debate over the years. Besides observing and describing the influence and importance of point of view to the construction of meaning of a narrative, the critics of literature establish relationships between point of view and other essential elements of narrative structure. Point of view is the way a story gets told. The author establishes the mode (or modes) by means of which the characters are presented to the reader, as well as setting, dialogue, actions, and events which constitute the narrative.

The question of point of view, discussed in the second chapter, has always been a practical concern of writers, who have developed many ways of presenting a story, using a diversity of methods. They have long recognized the importance of narrative point of view and how it creates the interest, the suspense, and the angle from which stories are told. Among the first writers to discuss point of view in detail are Henry James and Friedrich Spielhagen. I will present further discussions on this formal aspect of narrative and also examples of the treatment that the question of point of view has received in the second chapter. All these concepts will be helpful in order to analyze the importance of point of view in the short story and in the novel by William Faulkner presented in the third chapter.

[5] William Faulkner spent most of his lifetime in the rural environment of the Deep South. His Southernness has been a central concern of American criticism. As Cleanth Brooks states, the South provides Faulkner "with a vantage point from which to criticize, directly or perhaps merely by implication, the powerful metropolitan culture" (BROOKS, 1990, p. 1). This relation with Faulkner's South and the metropolitan culture is going to be analyzed in the chapter where his "modernism" is examined.

As I have said in the beginning of this introduction, my first interest was Faulkner's text, and the pleasure it gave me by demanding so much from me as a reader. Only later did I discover the name of what had mesmerized me: the way the narrative was constructed and his handling of point of view.

The importance of this investigation is its contribution to a new understanding of what is at stake in the form and in the content of Faulkner's narrative so as to highlight his greatness. In the bibliographical research done, I have not seen a study that analyzes Faulkner's experimentation and his experience by making a relation between a novel and a short story. As a matter of fact, I have checked Brazilian Databases, such as Lattes CV System[6] and CAPES Thesis and Dissertation Databank, and I found out that few researchers are conducting studies on William Faulkner. According to Lattes Database (LATTES Plataform, 2009, html), there are fifty-seven researchers that mention William Faulkner in their curriculum, but only twelve out of these fifty-seven indicate that the search terms are found in their curriculum with a frequency of 40% and over. This demonstrates that very few researchers in Brazil are solely dedicated to studying Faulkner's narrative.

Eleven studies with the key word William Faulkner appear at CAPES Thesis and Dissertation Databank (CAPES Database, 2009, html). Most of them refer to the novels, and only one, which is a study in translation, deals with a short story by Faulkner. This is evidence that my study of Faulkner's narrative, that includes also a short story as one of the objects of investigation, is long overdue, especially here in Brazil.

Notwithstanding, I would like to highlight the fact that Faulkner's work has received constant critical attention in the United States and all over the world. This is evidenced by the various studies that I was able to find, starting with American literary critics[7] as well as scholars from other countries. At first, criticism about his novels emphasized the historical,

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[6] Lattes Curriculum is a component of Lattes Platform developed by CNPq, and it is used by the MCT (Ministry of Science and Technology), FINEP (Projects and Studies Financing), CAPES/MEC (Personal Improvement Coordination/Ministry of Education), and all institutional actors, such as the Brazilian scientific community, as a curricular information system. The National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) is an agency linked to the Ministry of Science and Technology (MCT).

[7] The list of all critical studies on Faulkner would be almost endless. David Minter, in his preface to the second edition of *The Sound and the Fury: an authoritative text, backgrounds, and context criticism*, which he edited, fittingly affirms that "we now have a veritable mountain of criticism on Faulkner's fiction" (MINTER, 1994, p. x). However, it is relevant to mention here some of the major writers, critics, and scholars who have been responding to William Faulkner's work over the years. For instance, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, Frederick Hoffman, Olga Vickery, Wolfgang Iser, Donald Kartiganer, James Meriwether, David Minter, and so many others. International critical attention can be exemplified by Jean-Paul Sartre and his essay *On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner* (1939), where he refers to Faulkner and "his extraordinary art." Sartre states, "I like his art, but I do not believe in his metaphysics" (SARTRE, p. 271). In the late 1990s, I can add to the list Philip Weinstein, Richard Moreland, John Matthews, Michael Millgate, André Bleikasten, Ramón Saldívar, Cheryl Lester, Judith Wittenberg, Carolyn Porter, who have written books and essays on Faulkner, whose reading, by the way, have been a great help for the present research.

social, and moral aspects of his fiction. Later, exhaustive biographical studies have identified the people, the places, the personal experiences, the social and historical attitudes, and traditions and customs that Faulkner turned into art. Analyses of his narrative techniques, his narrative structures, his themes, his early prose experiments, his language, have probed the development and the depths and scope of his art and his genius.

This study assumes that Faulkner's work with the shorter narrative genre cannot be isolated from his efforts with the novel. The short stories must be set into the perspective of Faulkner's total output. And they must be subjected to the same kind of intensive technical and esthetic analysis that the novels have merited.

"All great storytellers have in common the freedom with which they move up and down the rungs of their experience as on a ladder".

Walter Benjamin

1. THE STORYTELLER

There are moments in our personal history as a reader that feel like beginnings or openings. The first time I read a short story by William Faulkner, which was called *A rose for Emily*, it was an unforgettable experience. I had no idea who Faulkner was, so it was just me and his text. It was like a revelation, like a key turning in a lock. I was fascinated by him as a storyteller. Moreover, I was mesmerized by the fact that his text demanded so much from me as a reader. Faulkner's text introduced me to narrative ambiguity, and gave me glimpses of two subjects that deserve attention: the surprising forms that narrative can take and the energy that writers of the twentieth century have generated through distortions of traditional forms of storytelling.

Storytelling is said to be the mother of all literary arts, and anyone who reads must occasionally speculate on its enduring power. This chapter discusses Walter Benjamin's essay *The storyteller*, in order to confront its assumptions with the works of William Faulkner. What is storytelling? Is Faulkner a storyteller? These are just a couple of the questions raised and they will be dealt with here, and in the following chapters.

Even though the beginnings of storytelling date from oral tradition, the writer of a story, as well as the narrator, can also be called a storyteller. The figure of the storyteller is said to have been responsible for the cultural aspects that were transmitted to different generations over the centuries. The storyteller was part of a web of shared experience and knowledge, thus feeding and maintaining collective memory[8].

[8] The concept of *collective memory* here refers to what a group of people or a community knows or remembers. This notion is based on the studies by Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), who stressed that our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems. Thus, collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present. The collective memory is shared, passed on and also constructed by the group.

While it can be said that storytellers have been part of the culture of American tribes since immemorial times, and in the nineteenth century produced literary icons such as Poe and Hawthorne, it is in the South of the United States that its tradition has produced one of the major examples: William Faulkner. Born in New Albany, Mississippi in 1897, William Cuthbert Falkner added the “u” in the spelling of his family name in 1919, and spent most of his lifetime in the rural environment of the Deep South.

1.1. BENJAMIN’S STORYTELLER

In 1936, when Walter Benjamin wrote the essay entitled *The storyteller: reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov*, he claimed that the age of storytelling is over. He laments the course of social, economic, and aesthetic history; so, in this context, he views the story as somehow out of place in modern culture. Benjamin sees a decline in the transmissibility of experience, which leads to a loss of the possibility of a tradition shared by a community, reconstructed in each generation in the continuity of the stories told. Benjamin considers, on the one hand, the development of the productive force and technique, specially its acceleration to serve capitalism; and, on the other hand, he reflects on the impossibility of memory and language to come to terms with a trauma. Benjamin observes that survivors from the atrocities of World War I came back silent because what they had experienced could not be put into words.

According to him, the storyteller is not a “present force,” mainly because “[h]e has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant.” By saying that “the art of storytelling is coming to an end” (p. 83), it is clear that Benjamin does not see any future for the telling of stories. Noteworthy is the fact that his essay[9] points

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[9] It was written by Benjamin, a German-Jewish writer experiencing the chaos of war and fascism. In 1940, Benjamin, who was about to emigrate to America, took his own life at the Franco-Spanish border. Hannah Arendt lists various reasons for his suicide, such as the fact that the Gestapo had confiscated “his Paris apartment, which contained his library (he had been able to get the more important half out of Germany) and many of his manuscripts, and he had reason to be concerned also about the others which […] had been placed in the Bibliothèque Nationale prior to his flight from Paris to Lourdes, in unoccupied France” (p. 17). Arendt goes on, “he chose death in those early fall days of 1940 which for many of his origin and generation marked the darkest moment of the war – the fall of France, the threat to England, the still intact Hitler-Stalin pact whose most feared consequence at that moment was the close cooperation of the two most powerful secret police forces in Europe” (p. 1).

to the disappearance of the storyteller. Its starting point is an analysis of the works by Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895), a Russian novelist, who is presented by Benjamin as the example of a true storyteller.

One of the points that Benjamin makes is the contrast between the craftsmanship of a novelist and a storyteller:

> The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times. […] What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature […] is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. (p. 87)

Here Benjamin distinguishes the novel from storytelling, on the grounds that the teller of a story gathers what he tells from his own experience and from others, creating a new experience for those who listen to him. On the other hand, a novelist isolates himself from this interchange of experience. Benjamin aligns storytelling with an oral tradition, whereas he sees the novel as a product of individualism, therefore detached from experience.

On affirming that the ability to exchange experiences has been taken from men, "More and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed" (p. 83), Benjamin perceives an obvious reason for this phenomenon: experience has fallen in value after World War I. After such a traumatic experience, the survivors remained silent, due to the fact that they could not express in language what they had experienced. Benjamin believed that this experience could not be part of the work of a novelist; he viewed the novel only related to individuality and bourgeois values. His assumptions on the novel as a narrative genre, a product of individualism detached from experience, prevent him from seeing the novelist as a storyteller.

Not only has experience been devalued, but it "has been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power" (p. 84). Benjamin highlights the replacement of physical tasks by machines, morals by authority, and so on. This is not a very hopeful picture, so Benjamin looks back on the importance of experience to storytelling and oral tradition to demonstrate how human experience is essential.

> Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. […] each sphere of life has produced its

> own tribe of storytellers. […] If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. (p. 84-5)

Besides the nostalgia that can be detected in the above excerpt, I see the importance of this web of experience for Benjamin's argument. According to him, a storyteller is someone "who has counsel for his readers" (p. 86). He acknowledges that having counsel has become old-fashioned, but he asserts that this "orientation toward practical interests is characteristic of many born storytellers" (p. 86). He states,

> [a]ll this points to the nature of every real story. It contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. But if today 'having counsel' is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. (p. 86)

Stressing experience and its connection to wisdom, he declares that "[c]ounsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom. The art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out" (p. 86-7). So he views this collaborative exchange of wisdom embedded in storytelling as doomed to failure.

In order to further explain the accelerated way of life under capitalism and the rise of media publication of stories with lack of creativity leaving no room for imagination, Benjamin details some differences between story, novel and information.

> Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. Leskov is a master at this […]. The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. (p. 89)

The main difference between storytelling and information for Benjamin is the amount of explanation. Back in 1936 he was already complaining about the excess of information, because for Benjamin a great story should not contain explanation in detail. So, the richness of the narrative should not be achieved through an overflowing of explanation. He even elaborates on the fact that "the value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time". However, a story is different, "[i]t does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time" (p. 90). But how is a story able to last?

Benjamin answers this question partially when he affirms that the "community of listeners" is responsible for retaining a story. Still, he says that the gift for listening is lost, "[f]or storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to" (p. 91). Clearly he is giving emphasis to memory and the retelling of stories.

Storytelling, as it is defined by Benjamin,

> does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel. […] Thus his tracks are frequently evident in his narratives, if not as those of the one who experienced it, then as those of the one who reports it. (p. 91-2)

Seen from this perspective, the storyteller cannot help but impregnate the story with his experience. But even this, in the words of Benjamin, modern man has succeeded in abbreviating. He gives the example of the evolution of the short story, "which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers" (p. 93). And, for Benjamin, this would constitute the most appropriate picture of the way in which the great narrative is revealed, that is, through the layers of a variety of retellings, like the bard and the oral epic poem.

Thus, great narrative is like the oral epic poem, says Benjamin. The figure of the bard is contrasted with the modern sense of authorship. The novelist is a storyteller who does not depend on other tellers before him, because what he tells is *novel*, which means *new*, so it is different from anything known before. Benjamin's perspective is based on a critique of bourgeois class values, associated with processes of modernity/modernization. For Benjamin, the novelist neither draws from the collective memory, nor from experience. The key element in his argument is the differentiation of the modern author from the storyteller; in other words, he discusses the epic genre versus the genre of the novel.

In addition to the cultural and historical changes mentioned above, Benjamin mentions another one. He reasons that the face of death must have changed because the idea of eternity has always had its strongest source in death. If this idea is declining, it shows that this change is identical with the one that has diminished the communicability of experience to the same extent as the art of storytelling has declined.

> And in the course of the nineteenth century bourgeois society has, by means of hygienic and social, private and public institutions, realized a secondary effect which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to make it

> possible for people to avoid the sight of the dying. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one […]. In the course of modern times dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. […] Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death, dry dwellers of eternity, and when their end approaches they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs. (p. 93-4)

Benjamin's considerations on the modern handling of death are important to his argument that dying is not a public process in the individual's life anymore. It is evidence that the communicability of this experience has been diminished by this secondary effect realized by bourgeois society.

In the twelfth section of his essay, Benjamin discusses the relationship of the epic form with historiography. He says, "written history would be in the same relationship to the epic forms as white light is to the colors of the spectrum". He continues, "[h]owever this may be, among all forms of the epic there is not one whose incidence in the pure, colorless light of written history is more certain than the chronicle" (p. 95). He names the chronicler "history-teller", for in the broad spectrum of the chronicle the ways in which a story can be told are graduated like shadings of one and the same color.

Benjamin argues that the historian is "bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world" (p. 96). In contrast, this is "precisely what the chronicler does, especially in his classical representatives, the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, the precursors of the historians of today". They based their historical tales on a divine plan of salvation – an inscrutable one, so from the beginning they have lifted "the burden of demonstrable explanation from their own shoulders". Its place is taken by interpretation, which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world.

> Whether this course is eschatologically determined or is a natural one makes no difference. In the storyteller the chronicler is preserved in changed form, secularized, as it were. Leskov is among those whose work displays this with particular clarity. Both the chronicler with his eschatological orientation and the storyteller with his profane outlook are so represented in his works that in a number of his stories it can hardly be decided whether the web in which they appear is the golden fabric of a religious view of the course of things, or the multicolored fabric of a worldly view. (p. 96)

After observing the role of the storyteller in comparison with the chronicler, Benjamin analyzes the listener's relationship with the storyteller. He affirms that it is controlled by the listener's interest in retaining what he is told.

> The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. Memory is the epic faculty *par excellence*. Only by virtue of a comprehensive memory can epic writing absorb the course of events on the one hand and, with the passing of these, make its peace with the power of death on the other. (p. 97)

The Muse of the epic art among the Greeks was Mnemosyne, the rememberer. Benjamin says that this name takes the observer back to a parting of the ways in world history. For "if the record kept by memory – historiography – constitutes the creative matrix of the various epic forms (as great prose is the creative matrix of the various metrical forms)," (p. 98) the epic, its oldest form, "by virtue of being a common denominator includes the story and the novel". When in the course of centuries the novel "began to emerge from the womb of the epic, it turned out that in the novel the element of the epic mind that is derived from the Muse – that is, memory – manifests itself in a form quite different from the way it manifests itself in the story" (p. 98).

Memory creates the chain of tradition which passes an event on from generation to generation, it "is the Muse-derived element of the epic art in a broader sense" (p. 98). It starts the web which all stories together form in the end. One continues to the next, as the great storytellers have always shown. Benjamin calls this "epic remembrance" and the Muse-inspired element of the narrative.

Then he contrasts the "perpetuating remembrance" of the novelist with the "short-lived reminiscences" of the storyteller.

> The first is dedicated to *one* hero, *one* odyssey, *one* battle; the second, to *many* diffused occurrences. It is, in other words, *remembrance* which, as the Muse-derived element of the novel, is added to reminiscence, the corresponding element of the story, the unity of their origin in memory having disappeared with the decline of the epic. (p. 98)

While Benjamin aligns remembrance with the novel, he relates reminiscence to the story. Both have a common origin, but the novel, for Benjamin, remains at the individual's level. The story, the narrative, appeals to/is embedded in a collective level. Consequently, oral or written stories are able to develop more freely, because they are shared.

> A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship. The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, more so than any other reader. (For even the reader of a poem is ready to utter the words, for the benefit of the listener.) In this solitude of his, the reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealousy than anyone else. He is ready to make it completely his own, to devour it, as it were. Indeed, he destroys, he swallows up the material as the fire devours logs in the fireplace. The suspense which permeates the novel is very much like the draft which stimulates the flame in the fireplace and enlivens its play. (p. 100)

In the above excerpt, Benjamin considers the reading audience of a novel. For him, the reading of a novel is as isolated as the novelist himself. Benjamin insists that the reader of a novel looks for "human beings from whom he derives the 'meaning of life'. Therefore he must, no matter what, know in advance that he will share their experience of death:" (p. 101) their figurative death, that is, the end of the novel; but preferably their actual one.

Ultimately, for Benjamin, what draws the reader to the novel is "the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about." In this sense, he sees the novel as significant because "this stranger's fate by virtue of the flame which consumes it yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate," not because it simply presents someone else's fate to us.

After all this discussion about the storyteller, the novelist, and so much more, one question still remains: what does it take to be a great storyteller? According to Benjamin,

> [a] great storyteller will always be rooted in the people, primarily in a milieu of craftsmen. […] In short, despite the primary role which storytelling plays in the household of humanity, the concepts through which the yield of the stories may be garnered are manifold. […] All great storytellers have in common the freedom with which they move up and down the rungs of their experience as on a ladder. A ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds is the image for a collective experience to which even the deepest shock of every individual experience, death, constitutes no impediment or barrier (p. 101-2).

Thus, for Benjamin, a storyteller has to be "rooted in the people". He must also access experience, whether his own or someone else's. Benjamin exemplifies this by admitting that the first true storyteller is the teller of fairy tales. "The fairy tale, which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story" (p. 102). He says that the fairy tale has always had good counsel and that this need was created by myth.

> Whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairy tale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest. This need was the need created by the myth. The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which the myth had placed upon its chest. […] in the shape of the animals which come to the aid of the child in the fairy tale it shows that nature not only is subservient to the myth, but much prefers to be aligned with man. The wisest thing – so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day – is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits. […] The liberating magic which the fairy tale has at its disposal does not bring nature into play in a mythical way, but points to its complicity with liberated man. A mature man feels this complicity only occasionally, that is, when he is happy; but the child first meets it in fairy tales, and it makes him happy. (p. 102)

So Benjamin believes in the “liberating magic” of the fairy tales, because it aligns mankind and nature, liberating them from myth[10]. Following his analysis, he praises Leskov and his kinship with the spirit of the fairy tale.

At the end of his essay, Benjamin recognizes as storytellers Nikolai Leskov, Wilhelm Hauff, Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Louis Stevenson[11]. Their practice is compared to that of the artisan, who can coordinate words, soul, eye, and hand. Unfortunately, Benjamin says, “[w]e are no longer familiar with this practice. The role of the hand in production has become more modest, and the place it filled in storytelling lies waste” (p. 108). In the sensory aspect of storytelling, the voice is not alone. In genuine storytelling the hand supports what is expressed in many ways.

> His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to tell his entire life. The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story. This is the basis of the incomparable aura about the storyteller, in Leskov as in Hauff, in Poe as in Stevenson. The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself. (p. 108-9)

In conclusion, for Benjamin, the storyteller is like a craftsman. He works with his material, which is human life, and fashions this raw material out of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way. Not only is he a craftsman, but also a teacher and a sage, because the storyteller offers counsel for many situations. His life does not comprise only his own experience, and what the storyteller knows from hearsay is added to his own.

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[10] In this case, the concept/definition of myth is a story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of a people.

[11] Nicolai Leskov, 1831-1895, Russian novelist; Wilhelm Hauff, 1802-1827, German poet and story writer; Edgar Allan Poe, American writer, 1809-1849; Robert Louis Stevenson, Scottish novelist and poet, 1850-1894.

"They found dramatized in Faulkner's work some truth about the South and their own Southerness that had been lying speechless in their experience".

Robert Penn Warren

2. THE STORYTELLER FROM THE SOUTH

Faulkner's Southernness has been a central concern of American criticism, from Cleanth Brooks and the New Critics to the present. As Bleikasten notes, "Faulkner's fiction is more patently grounded in a specific geographic area and a specific historical experience than that of any of his contemporaries" (1998, p. 75). Still, some considerations should be made about the fact that, year after year, his novels and stories are read by people all over the world, "most of whom will never know another South than his – a world within words" (idem, p. 75).

He was American and Southern, that is, his indebtedness to the popular traditions of Southern oratory and Southwestern humor has been established beyond dispute. Faulkner belonged, in his early years, to a community in which the telling and retelling of stories was still a major mode of social exchange and cultural transmission. Especially after the Civil War, when recounting the Southern past had become the nostalgic memory-keeping and myth-making of a defeated people.

According to Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner "was actually most fortunate in the place of his birth" (1990, p. 333). That countryside proved to be rich in materials required by his craftsmanship and a closer look at his family background can be helpful in order to understand his close connection to his regional/local identity. Faulkner represented the fourth generation of his family in the state. William Clark Falkner, his great-grandfather, had arrived in north Mississippi as a penniless boy in about 1840. Faulkner writes in a letter to Malcolm Cowley,

> My great-grandfather, whose name I bear, was a considerable figure in his time and provincial milieu. He was prototype of John Sartoris: commanded the 2nd Mississippi infantry, […] was a part of Stonewall Jackson's left at Manassas that afternoon [July 21, 1861]; we have a citation in James Longstreet's longhand as his corps commander after 2nd Manassas [August 29-31, 1862]. 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. (FAULKNER, 1977, p. 211-12)

The previous excerpt demonstrates that Faulkner was fascinated with his ancestor's character and career. As a man growing up during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Faulkner was "well aware of the older culture, which had not yet passed away, and yet alive to the new forces that were already altering that culture" (BROOKS, 1990, p. 335). Memories of the war that had allegedly put an end to the Old South were still vivid.

Kevin Railey, in his article on *Cavalier Ideology and History*, recognizes that Faulkner is "perhaps the only major American novelist virtually obsessed with history" (1992, p. 77). I would not say he is obsessed, but I would rather affirm that Faulkner is fascinated with history[12]. And what had happened in the history of the South of the United States? What could be part of Faulkner's individual and collective memory? A brief outline of Southern historical events is necessary to establish the preceding and surrounding context that Faulkner draws from while he is working in his stories.

For the purposes of this study, a look into the historical process[13] of Mississippi's social formations during the period between the Civil War and World War I is of great importance. Right after the Civil War, Delta plantocrats were able to control the political spectrum to their own advantage and solidify their economic assets, organizing large populations of blacks and many whites into a system similar to the old plantations, guided by an ideology similar to Cavalier paternalism, which had developed in the South after the cessation of the slave trade. Consequently, the plantocrats ensured a continuation of this paternalist ideology by maintaining strong political and social influence in the years after the Civil War.

This group's hegemony, its control of political and social influence, was eventually challenged by a group led in Mississippi by L. Q. C. Lamar, J. Z. George, and Edward C. Walthall. They were part of the political scene during Reconstruction, participating in the deal that led to Redemption[14] and in 1877 came into much more political power. These men, the Redeemers, were less involved with monoculture of cotton than they were with finance and industry. Moreover, they were more identifiable by an industrial capitalism and a bourgeois

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[12] First, some important dates in the literary history of American literature: the Revolutionary War (1775-81), the Civil War (1861-65), World War I (1914-18), and World War II (1939-45). This division into historical segments, although convenient, lacks consensus among scholars. Even so, I recognize the importance of major wars in marking significant changes in American literature.

[13] Railey conducted a careful investigation of that period in his article *Cavalier Ideology and History*. However, the interpretive slant placed on the information is my own.

[14] Redemption is a term white Southerners employed to refer to the reversion of the South to conservative Democratic Party rule after the period of Reconstruction (1865-1877), which followed the Civil War.

ethos than by the paternalist ethos held by the Cavalier plantocrats. The Redeemers began to undermine the paternalistic responsibilities inherent to the Cavalier position while at the same time manipulating images of the Old South for their own purposes[15]. In 1911, Redeemer and Redneck[16] coalitions pushed Cavalier paternalists out of office altogether.

In retrospect, the culmination of the political and economic struggle between the Cavaliers and the Redeemers/Rednecks can be seen as a resolution to the struggle between paternalism and capitalism which existed in the South at least since the advent of Jacksonian democracy[17]. Rarely is any society affected by or composed of only one ideology, and the South, historically, has been a particularly conflicted social arena. Paternalism suggests a stable, hierarchical and consciously elitist social order, and here I am paraphrasing James Oakes' use of the term in his book called *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*. A paternalist attitude or pattern stresses each individual's acceptance of his or her place in a stratified social order, assuming an inherent inequality of men. Paternalism takes as its model the extended patriarchal household and establishes men as moral examples for this family. Paternalists also have a sense of honor in their dealings with others, even those they consider below them, and feel a responsibility toward society. Capitalism, or liberalism, as Oakes calls it, on the other hand, bases itself on the belief that all men are created equal; this system stresses individualism, social mobility, and economic fluidity within a society that promotes equal opportunity. Capitalism moves more toward the private, nuclear family, encourages men to strive for profit in the marketplace and puts women in the role of moral exemplar. Responsibility here is to the development of the self. Therefore, paternalism and capitalism are fundamentally different.

Now turning to William Faulkner's own family[18]. Faulkner's grandfather, J. W. T. Falkner, enjoyed the fruits of the Redeemers' economic policies, being involved in many businesses that made him extremely wealthy; he also held political office at various times between 1886 and 1903. As a public leader, he worked for civic improvements such as

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[15] By establishing policies to frustrate the black vote (which supported the plantocrats) and to encourage the white vote, the Redeemers opened the doors for further white electoral power, thereby also aiding in the eventual "rise of the Rednecks" (which only occurred after the advent of general elections).

[16] Rednecks, a term that was in common use by 1900, to designate the political coalitions of the poor white farmers in the South.

[17] Jacksonian Democracy refers to the political philosophy of United States President Andrew Jackson and his supporters. More broadly, the term refers to the period of the Second Party System (1824-1854). The Jacksonian era saw a great increase of respect and power for the common man, as the electorate expanded to include all white male adult citizens, rather than only land owners in that group. The Jacksonian Era lasted roughly from Jackson's 1828 election until the slavery issue became dominant after 1850 and the American Civil War dramatically reshaped American politics as the Third Party System emerged.

[18] I rely mainly on Joseph Blotner's *Faulkner: a biography* (which was first published in 1974 in two volumes, then updated and condensed in the 1991 edition, and reissued in 2005).

sewage systems and public lighting, and he would sometimes undertake public projects, such as sidewalks, at his own expense. He watched over his sons' careers carefully, and supplied them with every chance for success. He financed the education of two sons-in-law, took in and supported various members of the extended family at different times, and played an active part in his grandsons' lives, especially William Faulkner's. Though his law partner was an up and coming "redneck," he would not allow this man into his home, claiming that their acquaintance was business, not social. In short, Faulkner's grandfather was a patron. He took his social and familial responsibility seriously, caring for an extended family, and showing concern for social stability and improvement – all cornerstones of paternalist ideology. He also believed in the stratification of society and the natural inequality of men.[19]

His behavior contrasts sharply to that of his own father, Faulkner's great-grandfather, W. C. Falkner, whose assumption of a paternalistic pose was entirely cynical. W. C. Falkner claimed to be working for all of Mississippi while building his railroad; in the meantime, he bullied people, virtually picking their pockets while making outrageous promises he never kept. Even when he did donate money for a public cause, a school in Ripley, he did so more for what it would bring him than for altruistic reasons: he was trying to regain public respect after having been involved in shady activities during the Civil War. Also, he did not raise his son, Faulkner's grandfather; when his wife died, he gave his son to his uncle. At certain points the two men had disagreements about the lack of involvement W. C. had in his son's life. However, W. C. Falkner did rise from absolute obscurity to become a major figure in Mississippi's local history, and he remained loyal to his immediate family in each of his marriages. But, as revealed by his actions, he was not the same *patron* that his son became. Even though both men were from the same class and the same family, the constrast between them highlights the differences between those identifying with paternalist and capitalist values, those associated with the Cavaliers and the Redeemers, respectively.

Because Faulkner knew of his great-grandfather's behavior[20], he could not have ignored the fact that men used the language and appearances of paternalism to further their own selfish, profit-making pursuits. The existence of two distinct classes with different interests in 1830, when slave trade stopped, led to the different ideological positions. Once these positions became clear, however, there was no one-to-one relation between each man and his ideological position. People came to be identified with one or the other position, with

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[19] Once more I rely mainly on Joseph Blotner's *Faulkner: a biography* for factual information here and in the next paragraph.

[20] Carolyn Porter has already discussed W. C. Falkner, arguing that Southern paternalists were capitalists in purely rhetorical disguise.

various aspects of each, and some manipulated the language and images of one for their own personal gain or power. In other terms, some slaveowners were not paternalists, some men primarily involved in business were, and some avowing their paternalist allegiances were only trying to win votes or funds.

Cavalier ideology did not simply disappear, its value-system continued to have a presence, for it remained as a residual ideology. Though associated with the aristocratic past, and having little overall effect on the direction of the present, this ideology existed whithin the matrix of ideologies affecting Southerner's behavior. Faulkner is a Southerner and in his stories it is possible to find this perceived loss of status, one losing the social power it once possessed. Can I find in Faulkner's work[21] this ideological conflict experienced by Faulkner and others who felt alienated from and dispossessed by the changing world of the new South?

The South was instrumental in shaping Faulkner's language while providing him with abundant material for his fiction. In his introduction to a collection of critical essays on Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren shares the personal experience of reading his work.

> What happened to me was what happened to almost all the book-reading Southerners I knew. They found dramatized in Faulkner's work some truth about the South and their own Southernness that had been lying speechless in their experience. Even landscapes and objects took on a new depth of meaning, and the human face, stance, and gesture took on a new dignity. (WARREN, p. 1)

This collective and personal experience demonstrates how powerful the impact of Faulkner's fiction is, even for someone from the South. Warren goes on,

> If you, in spite of your own sometimes self-conscious and willed Southernness, had been alienated by the official Southern pieties, alibis, and daydreams, the novels of Faulkner told you that there was, if you looked a second time, an intense, tormented, and brutal, but dignified and sometimes noble, reality beyond whatever façade certain people tried to hypnotize you into seeing. With this fiction there was not only the thrill of encountering strong literature. There was the thrill of seeing how a life that you yourself observed and were a part of might move into the dimension of art. There was, most personally, the thrill of discovering your own relation to time and place, to life as you were destined to live it. (WARREN, p. 1)

So, according to Warren, Faulkner's talent in connecting history and culture, time and place becomes evident. Where Faulkner came from, and where he was writing at, definitely marked his work. Consequently, it left traces that readers could identify with. Regarding this,

[21] The figures most obviously connected to the "noble," old values of the past are Horace Benbow, Ike McCaslin and Gavin Stevens, all of whom have very little power, who indeed refuse their chances for social power. Faulkner's portraits of all three characters, like his handling of Quentin Compson, are loving, even though he delineates their weaknesses and limitations, all of which have to do with their common attachment to the Cavalier past.

the impact of the Southern oral tradition on his dialogues as well as on his rhetoric has often been noted.

Why is the South a place where orality is privileged? According to John Burrison, the "physical isolation of farms and plantations of the frontier and antebellum South, and the impoverishment of the post-Civil War South, supported a mindset that put a premium on the ways of the ancestors" (p. 19). Charles Joyner writes that storytelling sessions "functioned as both inspiration and education" (p. 98), in his discussion about the cultural traditions of the South.

However, this impact of Southern tradition is not limited to Faulkner's use of the Southern vernacular and to his debt to Southern oratory. According to research on orality, thought and speech are cumulative rather than subordinative, aggregative rather than analytic. In addition to this, Walter Ong affirms that they reveal a strong propensity for what rhetoricians used to call "copia" (p. 167). Copiousness and accumulation are also features of Faulkner's prose.

The movement of his writing is toward expansion and patterned repetition, with an interesting prevalence of parataxis, the adding on of narrative and descriptive statements tirelessly. His prose has a "voiced" quality, depicted by Bleikasten as "breathless, never-ending rush and rustle" (p. 88). This does not imply that Faulkner's novels are less than those coming directly out of an urban tradition of print conscious literacy. Faulkner's writing grew out of a young man's avid reading: "He well knew that when we read a novel only the eye listens" (BLEIKASTEN, p. 89). He was alert to the possibilities of typographic space as any of his contemporaries due to his sharp sense for visual patterns and even a real graphic gift.

Faulkner grew up with a lot of stories, so knowing, for him, begins with remembering and depends upon talking/retelling stories. His experience of the South, whether personal, familial and regional, shaped his identity as a writer. But can Faulkner be considered a storyteller on the terms presented by Walter Benjamin? Or is Benjamin right when he says that the art of storytelling has reached its end?

2. 1. FAULKNER AND MODERNISM

Labeled as modernist writers, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and T. S. Eliot express in their work, according to Raschke (2004), the impact on literature of the loss of certainty[22] in the realms of metaphysics, theology, and aesthetics. Raschke emphasizes the experience of loss as the essence of modernism. Her argument is that the accelerated pace of change resulting from the Industrial Revolution benefited the development of a modernist sensibility that took shape in the early twentieth century. Rapid social change was reflected in the radically new scientific and psychological theories of Darwin and Freud. Their theories of evolution and psychoanalysis challenged long-established beliefs about the self and individual autonomy, creating a crisis of knowledge and a loss of certainty. With this loss of certainty came the death of God and the disappearance of the omniscient author, according to Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel*:

> To sum up, we can say that the novel requires a world view which is centred on the social relationships between individual persons; and this involves secularization as well as individualism, because until the end of the seventeenth century the individual was not conceived as wholly autonomous, but as an element in a picture which depended on divine persons for its meaning, as well as on traditional institutions such as Church and Kingship for its secular pattern (1965, p. 84).

Watt's study also states that "the novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation" (id., p. 13). Modernist narratives move away from the traditional linearity of eighteenth and nineteenth-century novels. The catastrophe of World War I and its effects on literature devastated coherence and doubts were raised about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the dissonant and harsh realities of the postwar world[23]. New forms of literary construction and rendering break up narrative continuity, and violate the traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language by the use of stream of consciousness and other innovative modes of narration.

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[22] Levitt argues that the Modernist novel displays "a persistent ambiguous worldview. For if anything at all is certain in the novels of Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Mann, Woolf, Faulkner, et al., it is that nothing is certain; the world made possible by those eminent Victorians Darwin, Marx, Freud, Frazer and Einstein, in the aftermath of the First World War, which destroyed a continent's and a century's expectations, and of the Treaty of Versailles, which virtually guaranteed a Second World War, is inevitably a world of ambiguity" (p. 5).

[23] In 1922, the simultaneous appearance of such monuments of modernist innovation such as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, as well as many other experimental works of literature, signal that the inherited mode of ordering a literary work, which assumed a relatively coherent and stable social order, could not accord with their panorama of contemporary history.

While Victorian or realistic narratives feature an authoritative narrator, modernist works tend to be written in the first person or to limit the reader to a character's point of view on the action. This limitation denotes the modernist sense that "truth" does not exist objectively but it is the product of a personal interaction with reality. What has changed? The concept of reality is one example of the dramatic change found in modernism. Supporting structures of human life, whether social, political, religious, or artistic, are shown as falsehoods or destroyed. That could be one of the explanations why modernist literature abandons order, and sequence, renovating itself to express the new interpretation of the world as a broken image. It is the construction out of fragments that becomes an important formal characteristic of the modernist text.

In his book *The Rhetoric of Modernist Fiction*, Morton Levitt states that the first and most important decision "any storyteller must make – whether in speech or in writing, whether he or she does so consciously or without thought – is the prism through which the story's events will be revealed to the reader" (2006, p. 17). Not only is point of view an essential element[24] in narrative, but it has also been the center of much heated debate over the years.

Point of view is the way a story gets told. It is the "mode (or modes) established by an author by means of which the reader is presented to the characters, dialogue, actions, setting, and events which constitute the *narrative* in a work of fiction" (ABRAMS, 1999, p. 231). It is possible to see that this definition of point of view[25] takes the role of the reader into consideration, but only insofar as the reader responds to the story.

Writers have developed many ways of presenting a story, using a diversity of methods. They have long recognized the importance of narrative point of view and how it creates the interest, the suspense, and the angle from which stories are told. According to Wallace Martin

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[24] Brazilian scholar Massaud Moisés, in his dictionary of literary terms first published in 1974, states that point of view is a synonym of focus of narration and visual angle. I had access to the twelfth edition of that work, which is said to have been revised. As a matter of fact, I noticed that regarding point of view, it was updated, carrying detailed information on various studies about point of view.
The same holds true when reading Ligia Chiappini Moraes Leite's *O foco narrativo*. She gives a complete and didactic account of the most relevant studies that have been made on the subject. Still, Leite does not mention more recent studies such as those conducted by Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal, which are highlighted by Salvatore D'Onofrio in his latest book called *Forma e sentido do texto literário*.

[25] According to Baldick, point of view is "the position or vantage-point from which the events of a story seem to be observed and presented to us" (1996, p. 173). For instance, in "a first-person narrative, the narrator speaks as "I", and is to a greater or lesser degree a participant in the story" (ibid., p. 231). This degree of participation limits the information the narrator knows and how much of it he or she is going to pass on to the reader.

(1987, p. 133), among the first writers to discuss point of view in detail are Henry James and Friedrich Spielhagen[26].

And it was Henry James who “both gave us the term ‘point of view’ and provided the first theoretical words on the subject” (LEVITT, 2006, p. 2). From 1907 to 1909, James’ prefaces to his various novels, collected as *The art of the novel* in 1934, made point of view one of the most prominent and persistent concerns in modern treatments of the art of prose fiction. In 1921, *The craft of fiction*, by Percy Lubbock, codified and expanded upon James’ comments.

By 1960, the theoretical framework used by most English and American critics on discussing point of view was fully developed and it can still be found in introductory literature textbooks. However, every aspect of this theory has been challenged over the past forty years. In a nutshell, these disputes range from the interpretation of grammatical conventions to the ways in which stories communicate meaning, the features that should be used in defining point of view and the relationship of narratives to reality[27].

Fenson and Kritzer, in their *Reading, Understanding, and Writing about short stories*, refer to the use of point of view by the writer as a way of management, because “the large pattern or meaning of a story emerges from the writer’s careful manipulation of its various formal elements – action and conflict, characterization, point of view, tone, symbolism, and language” (1966, p. 4). By handling all these formal elements the author of a story is able to achieve the desired effect.

Fenson and Kritzer advise that it is not every story that lends itself to a simple classification of point of view. “But the classification for its own sake is of little importance; again the important consideration is the understanding of how perspective is related to the needs of the story” (1966, p. 46). What did the writer want to convey in his text? How does the point of view shape the themes? Would the story change if told from a different viewpoint?

The statement made by Fenson and Kritzer gives encouragement to see point of view through the narrative, because “it is necessary now only to note that our evaluation of people

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[26] Even though most of the theoretical studies about point of view are from the twentieth century, his essays are some of the first to approach the matter of the author and the novel writing technique. For those interested, see SPIELHAGEN, Friedrich. *Beitrage zur theorie und technik des romans*. Leipzig: Staackmann, 1883.

[27] One of the latest studies to have been published is the book *Perspectives: modes of viewing and knowing in nineteenth-century England*, where Linda Shires states that the artwork, “negotiating perspective, holds in solution contradictory perspectives and stages a dialogue which exposes the strengths and limits of perspective, while maintaining gaps for alternative points of view. And it compels a rethinking and reviewing on the part of the viewer and reader about (and these terms are not opposites or serially parallel): representation and experience, viewing and reading, affect and judgment” (2009, p. 14).

is often influenced by the source of our knowledge about them" (ibid., p. 22). Although one cannot always trust the narrator, it is one of the sources of information:

> Since the point of view operating in the story determines the perspective through which we are made to view the filtered details, it is obvious that our attitude toward, and our understanding of the characters in the story will be influenced by this perspective (ibid., p. 22).

In *Story and Structure*, Perrine states that "Modern fiction writers are artistically more self-conscious. They realize that there are many ways of telling a story; they decide upon a method before they begin and may even set up rules for themselves" (1983, p. 182). He agrees with Fenson and Kritzer's emphasis on the writer and affirms that "with the growth of artistic consciousness, the question of point of view, of who tells the story, and, therefore, of how it gets told, has assumed special importance" (1983, p. 182). This could lead to the misunderstanding that the author, the narrator, and point of view are synonyms.

However, Wayne Booth's *The rhetoric of fiction*, which was first published in 1961, had already clarified that the whole point of a story is lost if one confuses narrator and author[28]. Booth argues that all narrative is a form of rhetoric[29], and that it is the "implied author", who "chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices" (1983[30], p. 74-5). For Booth, "narrator" refers to "the speaker in the work who is after all only one of the elements created by the implied author" (p. 73). I understand that Booth introduced the term 'implied author' so that he could discuss and analyze the ideological and moral stances of a narrative text without having to refer directly to a biographical author.

Development of narratology over the years has delved into the question of narrator and point of view. This leads to the question raised by Gérard Genette in his *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, first published in 1972, where he says that the expression point of view should be substituted by a more abstract one: focalization (1980, p. 187). He goes on stating that the variations of point of view in a story could be analyzed as changes in focalization.

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[28] "It is only by distinguishing between the author and his implied image that we can avoid pointless and unverifiable talk about such qualities as "sincerity" or "seriousness" in the author. [...] we have only the work as evidence for the only kind of sincerity that concerns us: Is the implied author in harmony with himself – that is, are his other choices in harmony with his explicit narrative character? [...] What is more, in this distinction between author and implied author we find a middle position between the technical irrelevance of talk about the artist's objectivity and the harmful error of pretending that an author can allow direct intrusions of his own immediate problems and desires." (BOOTH, p. 75).

[29] "The author cannot choose whether to use rhetorical heightening. His only choice is of the kind of rhetoric he will use." (BOOTH, p. 116).

[30] More than twenty years later, Booth recognizes the limitations of some of his statements over a fifty-six-page afterword to the second edition of the same book: "Whenever a book is widely discussed, the years of its reception can be for its author a time of painful education" (p. 401).

The two basic concepts involved in the study of focalization[31] are those of a focalizor – a perceiver – and that which is focalized – the perceived. If a story contains more than one focalizor, the shifts from one to another become an aspect of narrative structure. Besides registering the outer world, a focalizor is capable of self-perception. Moreover, he or she is able to think about what is seen or deciding in a course of action.

For Mieke Bal (1997), who mentions Booth's term 'implied author' in the first chapter of her book *Narratology: introduction to the theory of narrative*, the implied author is the result of the investigation of the meaning of a text, and not the source of that meaning. Only after interpreting the text on the basis of a text description can the implied author be inferred and discussed. In Booth's use of the term, it denotes the meanings that can be inferred from a text. Bal explains that the notion of an implied author is, in this sense, not limited to narrative texts, but can be applied to any text. This is why the notion is not specific to narratology, which has as its objective the narrative aspects of a narrative text. Bal makes clear that when she speaks of the narrator, she does not mean the author, nor the so-called 'implied author'. She defines the narrator as "that agent which utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text or the equivalent of that agent in other media" (p. 18, 1997). Her discussion helped me realize the importance of confining oneself to this definition to avoid confusions which ultimately lead to an appropriation of authority, blurring of textual nuances, and an invisibility of the power inequalities involved.

Mieke Bal's discussion is also helpful to clarify that even though narrator and focalization are closely related, only the narrator narrates, that is, "utters language which may be termed narrative since it represents a story" (p. 19, 1997). The focalizor is an aspect of the story this narrator tells, "[it] is the represented 'colouring' of the fabula by a specific agent of perception, the holder of the 'point of view.' If we see focalization as part of narration, we fail to make a distinction between linguistic […] agents and the purpose […] of their activity" (BAL, p. 19, 1997).

Even though narratology studies have insisted on the substitution of the expression point of view, scholars and critics continue to employ it. For the sake of exemplification, I mention here Morton P. Levitt's *The rhetoric of modernist fiction from a new point of view*, a study published in 2006. As he gives details about the art of point of view, after reading Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Mann, Woolf, Faulkner, Hemingway, Beckett, Kazantzakis and many

[31] In 1972, Genette made narrative focus a topic of critical interest. Mieke Bal improved on his theoretical scheme in 1977. The expression "focus of narration" was first proposed by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in their textbook *Understanding Fiction* from 1943.

others through eyes which have also read Booth[32], Levitt believes that point of view is every novelist's first decision in writing and that it is the clearest determinant of a worldview as expressed in fiction. He also states that point of view lies at the heart of the Modernist novel. This is where he and Booth are in reasonably close agreement. Moreover, Levitt claims that it is imperative for all those concerned with the history of the novel to understand the centrality of point of view in their great accomplishment.

I have to agree with Levitt's concern that, as a rule, "we approach point of view from the writer's perspective [...]. But it is far more revealing to regard point of view as it impacts the reader" (2006, p. 35). It is the reader's response that matters most for the reception of the novel. An example of this is Henry James' use of point of view, which makes increasing demands on his reader. It is indeed with James that "the active modern reader begins and the passive Victorian reader ends forever in significant serious fiction" (LEVITT, 2006, p. 24). Early in his carrier, James was aware of the nuanced possibilities of point of view as a means of eliciting moral response from his reader.

I understand that choosing a point of view over another is directly related to the effect an author wishes to create. A writer can distance the reader from the story by using a limited point of view, for example. Annie Dillard, in her book *Living by fiction*, properly says that the use of limited point of view "diminish[es] our emotional involvement in the tale and draw[s] attention to the teller" (1988, p. 43). It distances the reader from the action narrated in the story.

Disagreeing with generalizations that lead to simplifications in the appropriation of theories, I agree with Wallace Martin when he admits that focus "must be treated as an independent constituent of point of view, alongside grammatical person of the narrator and access to consciousness" (p. 146), because these elements cannot be considered exactly the same as the others.

All these concepts are helpful in order to analyze the importance of point of view in a narrative. Despite the differences in the theories I have highlighted and discussed here, they are indispensable for an understanding of this structural aspect of narrative discourse.

I have argued that Faulkner, in addition to being a novelist, can also be considered a storyteller. Following that line of thought, could Faulkner's use of point of view be

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[32] Clearly aiming at advancing on Booth's major work, Morton P. Levitt's *The rhetoric of modernist fiction: from a new point of view*, describes Booth's work as being monumental, telling of its weaknesses and its strengths right on the first pages. Even though Levitt acknowledges Booth's limitations, he believes that developing and expanding the latter's method would help resolve a great deal of the questions that have arisen in recent years regarding the Modernist novel.

considered more than merely a modernist experiment? Does his Southern experience have any impact in that experimentation?

Faulkner was American and Southern. Thus, he belonged to a community where the telling and retelling of stories was still an important means of social exchange and cultural transmission[33]. He grew up in a storytelling environment. Did this make him a different modernist? It certainly made Faulkner a different modernist than his fellow writers in Europe, who were writing within distinct urban cultures. Marcel Proust's work is associated with Paris, James Joyce's with Dublin, Franz Kafka's with Prague, to name but a few.

Faulkner expresses the loss of certainty in terms of breakdowns of meaning, structure, and origin, Raschke says. As a writer, he accomplishes this by putting the reader in the position of seeking to integrate what is broken, to put together the facts of the story by him/herself. Throughout most of Faulkner's stories, time is treated in a special way: present, past, and future events are mixed[34]. On the level of the self, characters such as Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*, Darl Bundren in *As I Lay Dying*, and Joe Christmas in *Light in August* feel isolated and fragmented. They are constructed as disrupted subjectivities, mainly because of the way Faulkner handles such modernist techniques as stream of consciousness, interior monologues, and multiple narrative points of view. I understand that these techniques thus convey a loss of coherence in terms of both content and form.

So, what is Faulkner's modernist take on storytelling? He reveals a possible answer to that question in the way he shows how the understanding of reality is contingent upon multiple points of view. The differences between versions of the same story are sometimes contradictory, but Faulkner accepts these discrepancies as part of the uncertainty of the modern world. Faulkner's work is full of references to voices, and some of his greatest novels are told by multiple narrators, placing the reader in the position of a listener who must reconcile the fragments and versions of the stories told. This is a result of the influence of the oral tradition that is evidenced by Faulkner's frequent use of oral storytelling frames in his fiction[35].

However, Faulkner's use of point of view is unique and different from the other modernist writers whose break in narrative structure "represented a flight from the historical

[33] Recounting the Southern past, especially after the Civil War, had become the nostalgic memory-keeping and myth-making of a defeated people.

[34] "Yesterday today and tomorrow are Is: Indivisible: One." Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* (p. 194).

[35] On that same note, "Much of the action of Faulkner's novels […] consists of remembering and talking. In this way old tales and old telling of them are evoked, preserved, and transmitted" (MINTER, 2004, p. 57). Anderson notes, "the intimacy of Faulkner's contact with storytellers appears in the way he often emphasizes telling and listening as themselves vividly lived experiences" (2007, p. 10).

as much as a revision of it" (ABOUL-ELA, 2005, p. 495). In Faulkner's case, even though history may not be linear, his narrative "draws us back to a regional and material politics of space rather than attempting to use aesthetics to transcend it" (ibid., p. 496). This aspect of Faulkner's narrative strategy reinforces the argument that he is a genuine storyteller, one who is closely linked to his local, individual, collective experience, one who also shares the uncertainty of a modernist wordly view, but is still grounded in a very specific geographical area, his imaginary Yoknapatawpha.

"I heard an echo, but not the shot".

"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".

"So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe someday you will remember this and write about it".

William Faulkner

3. ENGENDERING A FICTIONAL WORLD

Perhaps because of the intense interest in Faulkner's novels, criticism has downplayed the interrelationships between the novel and the short story in terms of the recurrence of characters and events that partake in the Yoknapatawpha saga. Some characters, such as Gavin Stevens, make their first appearance in a short story. Others, like Quentin Compson, move from the novels to the short stories. The child narrator of *That Will Be Fine* (1935), which concerns the Compson family, closely resembles Jason in the 1929 *The Sound and the Fury*.

The basic stories of several novels were first envisioned and developed as short stories. The tale of the rise of Flem Snopes is first developed in *The Big Shot*, an unpublished early story. The core story of *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) is developed in capsule form in *Evangeline*, also an unpublished story. In July 1931, Faulkner submitted *Evangeline* to two magazines, and after the second rejection, he stopped trying to publish the story.

The interrelationship between novel and short story is also demonstrated in the fact that a couple of Faulkner's novels were constructed from short stories that had been published separately. Six previously published stories about the John Sartoris family during and right after the Civil War and one new story make up the seven chapters of *The Unvanquished* (1938). Eight published stories were revised to create the seven chapters of the novel *Go Down, Moses* (1942). In *The Hamlet*, Faulkner revised and incorporated four stories about the Snopes clan, and in *The Mansion* he included a story entitled *Hog Pawn*. The short story discussed in this study, *A Rose for Emily*[36], was not reshaped for inclusion in novels.

Faulkner's short stories are currently available in different collections. For instance, in one of the earliest of them, *Knight's Gambit* (1949), Faulkner grouped five previously

[36] Originally published on the April 30, 1930, issue of *Forum*, it was Faulkner's first short story published in a major magazine. A slightly revised version was published in two collections of his short fiction, *These Thirteen* in 1931, and *Collected Stories* in 1950. The version of the story analyzed here was taken from *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (1995). It has been published in several anthologies as well.

published Gavin Stevens detective stories and a new story, that gave the volume its title. In 1950, Faulkner selected forty-two published and unpublished works for *Collected Stories*. The posthumous collection *Uncollected Stories*, edited by Joseph Blotner, was published in 1979. It includes twelve pieces that Faulkner had published but had not included in any collection and thirteen unpublished stories that were previously available only in manuscript or typescript.

Faulkner's active short story writing career[37] encompasses thirty-five years, from 1919 to 1944. However, in that period, he had only two spans of intensive short-story production, in which he wrote most of his stories. The two periods correspond generally with a need for ready money. By 1929, Faulkner had published four novels, but none had produced much money. In that same year, marriage and the purchase of a house[38] that required much repair could have contributed to his intense interest in the short narrative genre.

From 1929 through 1931, he wrote or revised twenty-eight stories. The record that he began to keep in 1930 registers the date or dates a story was sent out but not its composition. The first story that Faulkner published in a national magazine, *A Rose for Emily* (1930), is one of his greatest stories, rich in narrative material and in narrative technique. Three more of his finest stories, *Red Leaves*, *Dry September*, and *Mountain Victory*, are also among the earliest stories of this first short story period. By the time Faulkner decided to concentrate his efforts in writing short stories, he was a mature and skilled craftsman. He had already produced two innovative masterpieces, *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.

When a new source of income developed, his initial dedication to the short story ended rather abruptly. The publication in 1931 of *Sanctuary* brought him notoriety and he was invited to write film scripts. Within a few years, however, his desire to escape Hollywood generated a second wave of writing short narratives for money. During this period, from the mid-1930s to 1942, he wrote and published the cycle of Civil War stories that became *The Unvanquished* (1938), the stories that he reshaped to create *Go Down, Moses* (1942), and four of the *Knight's Gambit* stories, as well as seven others. Over the next twenty years, Faulkner published only two additional short stories[39].

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[37] I rely mainly on Joseph Blotner's *Faulkner: a biography* (1974) and David Minter's *William Faulkner: his life and work* (1980), since Edmond Volpe refers to both of them in his study *A reader's guide to William Faulkner: the short stories* (2004).
[38] William Faulkner buys Rowan Oak, an elegant Oxford estate in 1930. In need of funds (a need that will continue for the next twenty years), Faulkner begins aggressively to market his short stories along with his novels, the former often paying better.
[39] The chronology that I have adopted is based upon the information and opinions concerning dates of composition that are offered primarily by biographers Joseph Blotner, David Minter, and Frederick Karl and

Among Faulkner's nineteen novels, fifteen were written in the period from the late 1920s to the early 1940s. Most of his short stories were also composed during this productive period. The short story selected for this study was first published in a magazine, according to the date previously mentioned here. But later, in his *Collected Stories* (1950), Faulkner grouped it with others. When refering to *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, Edmond Volpe argues that Faulkner "sought to establish a unity in the volume" (VOLPE, 2004, p. 3) just like he had done in his first collection of short stories *These Thirteen* (1931), where, according to Michael Millgate (1966), the thirteen stories are grouped under three untitled sections by geography and subject matter. Thus, it is possible to see that, for Faulkner, the setting of the fiction was of major importance.

Initiating with *Sartoris* (1929), he first enters into his Yoknapatawpha County. Jefferson is Yoknapatawpha's county seat. In no map of Mississippi can this county be found, but it is clearly fashioned around the geographical and cultural area where Faulkner had grown up[40]. The population was richly diverse and it was constituted of old plantation families, some of them still living on their lands, others having moved to town; the poorer whites, many of them sturdy yeoman farmers, but others landless who worked farms on shares with the owners. And there were still others, the "white trash," who were looked down upon by the blacks as well as the other whites. The number of shopkeepers and mechanics was still small, though growing. And the land was still important. Jefferson had some physicians and lawyers, many of them coming from the old gentry. There were many blacks, most of them still on the land, but some with various kinds of jobs in town, many of them working as household servants. These people also populate *Absalom, Absalom!* and *A Rose for Emily*.

I assume that Faulkner's work with the short story cannot be isolated from his efforts with the novel. The short stories must be set into the perspective of Faulkner's total output. And they must be subjected to the same kind of intensive analysis that the novels have merited.

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bibliographers James Meriwether and Hans Skei. They do not always agree, but there is sufficient consensus about approximate composition dates to establish, for my purposes, a meaningful chronology.

[40] For detailed information regarding the comparison of the fictional county map and Lafayette County, Mississippi, see Calvin S. Brown's article "Faulkner's Geography and Topography", PMLA, Vol. 77, no. 5, (Dec., 1962), pp. 652-659. Published by the Modern Language Association. http://www.jstor.org/stable/460414

3.1. *A ROSE FOR EMILY*

As it has already been mentioned in this study, one of the characteristics of modernist writers is the special use of point of view and other elements that make it somewhat difficult to read everything clearly on the first time. Vanspanckeren, in his *Outline of American literature*, confirms that

> Henry James, William Faulkner, and many other American writers experimented with fictional points of view (some are still doing so). James often restricted the information in the novel to what a single character would have known. Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) breaks up the narrative into four sections, each giving the viewpoint of a different character (including a mentally retarded boy) (1994, p. 62).

Even though his novels are the first to be mentioned, Faulkner used some of the same elements, for example, different points of view and non-sequential flashbacks, in his short stories. Vanspanckeren describes him as an "innovative writer", and he continues praising his abilities by writing that "Faulkner experimented brilliantly with narrative chronology, different points of view and voices (including those of outcasts, children, and illiterates)" (1994, p. 72). This study is going to exemplify some of the above mentioned characteristics by extracting excerpts from Faulkner's short story *A Rose for Emily*. Divided into five sections, it opens with the following paragraph,

> When Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old man-servant - a combined gardener and a cook - had seen in at least ten years. (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 119)

A Rose for Emily is told from the point of view of a nameless narrator and a longtime member of Jefferson, the town in which the story takes place. It opens with the death of Miss Emily Grierson and proceeds to tell the story of her life in the years leading up to her death. Considered one of the great writers of the twentieth century, Faulkner left behind a large body of work that effectively told the story of the American South, from the years following the Civil War to the Depression of 1929. More particularly, most of his stories and novels were set in the fictional county of Mississippi called Yoknapatawpha County, of which the town of Jefferson was the county seat.

Many of Faulkner's trademarks as a writer are evident in *A Rose for Emily.* In many of his works, for instance, Faulkner pulls his reader along by withholding important pieces of

information, leaving a great deal of work to the reader. In the opening section to *A Rose for Emily,* Faulkner provides only a few clues as to the time period of the story.

> Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor - he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron - remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.
>
> When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 119-20)

The narrator mentions that in 1894 Colonel Sartoris, who was the mayor of Jefferson at the time, freed Miss Emily of all obligations to pay her taxes, "dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity"—an edict that the new generation of town leaders "with its more modern ideas" found unacceptable. The narrator also describes how garages with gasoline pumps and cotton gins had encroached upon Miss Emily's property. But beyond these facts, Faulkner says nothing more as to the timing of the story.

Analyzing the nature of time in *A Rose for Emily* is another way of showing how the point of view chosen by the author really "determines the perspective through which we are made to view the filtered details" (FENSON; KRITZER, p. 22). Although the story is only a few pages long, it covers approximately three-quarters of a century. Faulkner cleverly constructed the story to show the elusive nature of time and memory.

In *A Rose for Emily*, the narrator does not show any interest in actual dates. S/he is more concerned with the conflict between time as a subjective experience and time as a force of physics. One excerpt from section five of the story exemplifies this concern. The narrator describes the elderly men gathered at Emily's funeral. Some of them fought in the Civil War, and they mistakenly believe that Emily is their contemporary, when in fact Emily was born some time around the Civil War. In the words of the narrator, these old men have confused

> time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of years (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 129).

It is here that the implied author profoundly comments on the human need to deny the passage of time, and the amazing capacity of the human mind to use memory in that ultimately futile denial.

There is no mention in the text about the circumstances of Miss Emily's death, only that in the years preceding her death, the black servant Tobe was the only person known to have entered her house. Thus, the reader, like the townspeople of Jefferson, is left in the dark as to the background of Miss Emily and her death.

The themes that begin to emerge in the opening section of *A Rose for Emily* are very characteristic of Faulkner's works. The themes of tradition and change, for example, are very much evident in these first pages. Although very little of Miss Emily is described, it is clear that she represents an older and dying part of Jefferson and, indeed, of the South at this time. When she was alive, Miss Emily was considered "a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation on the town", but now that she is dead, she has joined "the representatives of those august names where they lay […] among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson" (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 119). The Civil War and its generation, which had so strongly defined the South that Faulkner is describing, are dying out, along with their traditions.

Faulkner was also known for the ways in which he described class and racial divisions. Miss Emily is, or was once, clearly one of the more "aristocratic" members of the town; she lived on what was once the town's most "select" streets among other "august" families. By the end of the first paragraph, the reader knows that Miss Emily had "an old manservant", and in the third paragraph the narrator describes the former mayor Colonel Sartoris as the father of the edict that "no Negro woman should appear on the street without an apron." Further, the mere fact that Sartoris is referred to as "Colonel" and Emily as "Miss Emily" is indication of the importance of status and respect the town affords its (white) members.

Beyond merely describing the process of change taking place in his South, Faulkner also set out to make a statement about that change. Miss Emily, as a representative of the "Old South" of the Confederacy, does not merely die out in order to be replaced by members of the "New South". In the years preceding her death, Miss Emily is described as a decaying figure that is clinging to the past in a delusional way. Her house, which "had once been white", is the only house left on the block and had become "an eyesore among eyesores", and at the time of the visit by the deputation, Miss Emily is under that illusion that Colonel Sartoris is still alive. Even her physical attributes echo this sense of decay and decrepitude. When the deputation enters Miss Emily's house, they are greeted by

> a small fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold

> head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 121).

If it was not clear in the first section, it is clear by now that *A Rose for Emily* is not structured in a linear narrative form. The story, which began with Miss Emily's death, has now flashed back three decades to a time when "the smell" arose from Miss Emily's property, and two years prior to that when Miss Emily's father died and the town had to convince Miss Emily to dispose of his body properly.

The physical decay of Miss Emily and her surroundings that the narrator describes in the first section begins to make sense in section two as he describes Miss Emily as mentally disturbed. Here the story begins to take something of a "gothic" twist: Miss Emily, in denial over her father's death, refuses to give up her father's corpse—an indication of events to come.

In describing the town leaders at the time of "the smell", the narrator continues to emphasize the theme of "change" within the town: the Board of Alderman is described as comprising "three graybeards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation". Faulkner once again pushes forth the idea of the new generations taking over the running of the town, even thirty years prior to Miss Emily's death at the "beginning" of the story. And the theme of class distinctions and traditions is further emphasized when Judge Stevens refuses to "accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad".

Perhaps the most important sentence in the entire story occurs at the start of this section: "So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell" (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 121). The use of the definite article in this sentence is telling. It is not merely "a smell" that raised the attention of the townspeople; it is "the smell". By using the definite article here, the narrator is granting significance to the smell that the indefinite article "a" would not give it. He is implying that "the smell" will return to play an important role with the story. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of "the smell" with Miss Emily's refusal to give up the dead body of her father not only adds to the gothic element of the story, but also foreshadows events to come.

The themes of class, race and status are prevalent throughout Faulkner's writing, and Faulkner addresses those themes repeatedly in *A Rose for Emily*. The society of Jefferson is segregated by race, extremely class conscious, and extremely conscious of societal rank and

status. When Miss Emily is seen in public with Homer Barron, the townspeople are abhorred on two accounts: first, that Barron is a "Yankee", and second, that he is a "day laborer", even if he is a foreman. A "real lady" such as Miss Emily, and a Grierson at that, should never forget her social duty, her "noblesse oblige", by cavorting with such a person. A true Southern lady would only consider a Southern white man of similar social standing.

Nevertheless, Miss Emily spends Sundays with Barron, ignoring the whisperings of her fellow Jeffersonians. And true to her character, when Miss Emily visits the druggist to purchase some poison for reasons not yet known, she refuses to tell the druggist the purpose of the poison. And true to the townspeople's relationship with Miss Emily, the druggist does not press the issue and gives Miss Emily what she wants.

The "noblesse oblige" that Miss Emily has seemed to have forgotten comes around to affect the town's—especially the "ladies'"—view of Miss Emily. After Miss Emily purchased the poison from the druggist, the town became overly preoccupied, even obsessed, with her and her relationship to Barron. Each of Miss Emily's actions is held under great scrutiny by the town, and when Barron returns after a brief departure, the town is at last convinced, and much relieved, that their marriage will finally take place. No longer will Miss Emily be a "disgrace" and a "bad example".

However, Faulkner continues to provide readers with ominous hints of Barron's fate. "And that was the last time we saw Homer Barron", the narrator recounts and immediately thereafter recalls "that night when they sprinkled the lime." Barron's fate is effectively linked in this passage to the sprinkling of the lime and its evocation of death.

The theme of progress and change within the community is also once again addressed, this time in relation to Miss Emily's refusal to allow the post office to attach a mail box and metal numbers to her door. As the town is taken over by a "newer generation", Miss Emily continues to grow "grayer and grayer" until her hair becomes the "vigorous iron-gray" color that it would have at her death. And the description of Miss Emily's hair being "iron-gray" will come to play an important role in the story.

Until the very day of Miss Emily's death, the community continues to act with a great deal of respect to the rites of death, in spite of the generations that have come and gone. When Miss Emily dies, the "ladies" of the town call on the house, just like they had done at the death of Emily's father. Tobe's immediate departure, never to be "seen again", offers yet another ominous hint of things yet to transpire. The town's preoccupation/obsession with Miss Emily is further evidenced by the fact that the town had always known that "there was a room in that region above the stairs [in Miss Emily's house] which no one had seen in forty

years." What other person, or what other house, in the town had ever received this much attention?

The conclusion to *A Rose for Emily* provides the story with the gothic-like twist that has been hinted at since the early stages of the story. With the conclusion, all the questions that the town had ever had over the years have been answered. What had happened to the man's toiletry set and suit? What ever happened to Homer Barron? What was the "dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse" Miss Emily doing on her own all those years?

With the ending, Faulkner also forces the reader to reexamine the narration from the very beginning for the continual hints of Barron's fate that he offers. For example, Faulkner describes Miss Emily by her "skeleton" in the first section; he refers to "the smell" in section two; in section three, the arsenic appears; and in section four, the mention of "the last we saw of Homer Barron" is juxtaposed with the narrator's recollection of the sprinkling of the lime. Each of these moments in the story gain greater relevancy with the ending.

Finally, all of these clues contribute to the way the reader understands the story. This is why the point of view chosen by Faulkner is so important. It really creates an atmosphere of suspense. Not only does he lead the reader to certain conclusions and then surprises him or her; he also forces the reader to read the story again.

This has to do with Rogel Samuel's thoughts on literature reading, when he states (2005, *Novo Manual de Teoria Literária*, p. 119) that the meaning results from an interaction between text and reader, just like an effect that has to be experimented, not as a message that has to be understood. It is the writer's careful manipulation of point of view that enhances the effect experienced by the reader, as has been shown throughout this study. In *A Rose for Emily*, the narrator's point of view changed at least three times as the story was being told. First, the narrator's words emphasize her strength and pride. Second, her unfriendliness appears in the lines of the short story. Then, as if they had been filtered, her horrifying actions are highlighted through the particular use of point of view as the narrator uses the first person plural, considering him/herself a member of Emily's southern conservative community.

The narrator, beginning with Miss Emily's death announcement, recounts the story of her life as a lonely woman living in the South in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, and who was left penniless by her father. He overprotected his daughter and drove away suitors from her. When her father died, she was left with a large, dilapidated house, into which the townspeople have never been invited, and there is almost lurid interest among them when they are finally able to enter the house upon Emily's death.

Lye points out the issue of "re-reading: that a second reading is a different reading from the first, especially in the case of stories in which the reader is in a position of suspense, of knowing no more that the characters do" (2003). Faulkner is a writer who knew how to make his reader want to read his stories again. By using a narrator difficult to be identified and mixing past, present and future events, he created an atmosphere of suspense in the short story.

That is one of the reasons why it is important now to take a closer look into the way Faulkner constructed his text so as to see the point of view that is present in this short story. *A Rose for Emily* is divided into five sections. The first starts with the description of Miss Emily Grierson's funeral, "our whole town went to her funeral" (1995, p. 119). An unnamed narrator, who always refers to himself in collective pronouns, explains the motives everybody in town showed up, "the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old man-servant – a combined gardener and cook – had seen in at least ten years" (p. 119). While the men attend the funeral out of obligation, the women go primarily to satisfy their curiosity.

Then Emily's house is described as being once a grand house "set on what had once been our most select street" (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 119). Emily's origins are aristocratic, but both her house and the neighborhood have deteriorated. The narrator notes that prior to her death, Emily had been "a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town" (1995, p. 119). This is because Colonel Sartoris, the former mayor of the town, remitted Emily's taxes dating from the death of her father "on into perpetuity" (1995, p. 120). Apparently, Emily's father left her with nothing when he died. Colonel Sartoris invented a story explaining the remittance of Emily's taxes - it is the town's method of paying back a loan to her father - to save her from the embarrassment of accepting charity.

The narrator uses this opportunity to show the first of several flashbacks in the story. The first incident he describes takes place approximately a decade before Emily's death. A new generation of politicians takes over Jefferson's government. They are unmoved by Colonel Sartoris's grand gesture on Emily's behalf, and they attempt to collect taxes from her. She ignores their notices and letters. Finally, the Board of Aldermen sends a deputation to discuss the situation with her. The men are led into a decrepit parlor by Emily's black man-servant, Tobe. The first physical description of Emily is unflattering: she is "a small, fat woman in black" who looks "bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue" (1995, p. 121). After the spokesman awkwardly explains the reason for their visit, Emily repeatedly insists that she has no taxes in Jefferson and tells the men to see

Colonel Sartoris. The narrator notes that Colonel Sartoris has been dead at that point for almost ten years. She sends the men away from her house with nothing.

In the second section of the short story, there is another flashback, this time recounting events that took place thirty years before the failed tax collection.

> So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell. That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart - the one we believed would marry her - had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man - a young man then - going in and out with a market basket.
>
> "Just as if a man - any man - could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons. (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 122)

It is at this point that Emily's neighbors complain of an awful smell coming from her house. Then the narrator says that Emily had a sweetheart who deserted her shortly before the neighbors had started complaining about the stench. The town's ladies attribute the smell to Emily's man-servant, Tobe, and his poor housekeeping skills. In spite of all these complaints, the mayor of the town during this period, Judge Stevens, is reluctant to do anything about it. He demonstrates fear of offending Emily, "Dammit, sir, […] will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?" (1995, p. 122). This forces a small group of men to take action. Four of them sneak around Emily's house after midnight, sprinkling lime around her house and in her cellar. When they are done, they see that "a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol" (1995, p. 123).

It is possible to see that the narrator notes the community's pity for Emily at this point in a discussion of her family's past.

> That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. […] At last they could pity Miss Emily. (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 123)

It is revealed by the narrator that Emily once had a mad great-aunt, old lady Wyatt. He also notes that Emily is apparently a spinster because of her father's insistence that "none of the young men were good enough" (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 123) for her. The narrator then

describes the awful circumstances that follow Emily's father's death. And he/she comments on that using first-person plural:

> We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 124).

At first, Emily refuses to acknowledge that her father is dead. After three days, she finally breaks down and lets the townspeople remove his body. This deep denial of the death of her father is a sign of events yet to appear in the story, because she cannot face her loneliness either. Similarly, this hint prepares the reader for her clinging to Homer Barron.

The narrator begins to detail Emily's growing relationship with Homer Barron, a Yankee construction foreman, in section three: "we began to see him and Miss Emily [...]" (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 124). The narrator seems sympathetic, but the ladies and many of the older people in town find Emily's behavior scandalous.

They gossip about how pathetic Emily has become whenever she rides through the town in a buggy with Homer. They say "Poor Emily" and begin whispering "behind their hands" (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 125). However, the narrator notes that Emily still carries herself with pride, even when she purchases arsenic from the town's druggist. The druggist tells her that the law requires her to tell him how she plans to use the poison, but she simply stares at him until he backs away and wraps up the arsenic. He writes "for rats" on the box.

At the beginning of section four, the town believes that Emily may commit suicide with the poison she has purchased. The narrator flashes the story back again by detailing the circumstances leading up to Emily's purchase of the arsenic. At first, the town believes that Emily will marry Homer Barron when she is seen with him, despite Homer's statements that he is not the marrying type. However, a marriage never takes place, and the boldness of their relationship upsets many of the town's ladies, who send a minister to speak to Emily. But, the next Sunday she is seen riding through town in the buggy with Homer again. So, the minister's wife sends away for Emily's two female cousins from Alabama, hoping that they can persuade Emily to either marry Homer or end the affair. While the cousins are visiting her, Emily buys Homer a personalized toilet set, and a complete set of men's clothing, including a nightshirt.

Aware of these purchases, the town is lead to believe that Emily will marry Homer and chase the cousins off. Apparently to give Emily the opportunity to get rid of the conceited cousins, Homer leaves Jefferson. A week later, the cousins leave. Three days after they leave,

Homer is seen going into Emily's house. Homer is never seen again after that, and the townspeople believe he has broken up with Emily.

Emily is not seen for almost six months. When she is finally seen in town again, she is fat and her hair has turned gray. Except for a period of six or seven years when she gives china-painting lessons, her house remains closed to visitors. She doesn't allow the town to put an address on her house, and she still ignores the tax notices they send her. Occasionally, she is seen in one of the downstairs windows; she has apparently closed the top floor of the house. Finally, she dies, alone except for her man-servant, Tobe.

At the beginning of section five, the narrator returns to his recollection of Emily's funeral. As soon as Tobe lets the ladies into the house, he leaves out the back door and the servant is never seen again. The funeral is described as a morbid affair. Right after Emily is buried, several of the men force the upstairs open. Up there they find what is evidently the rotten corpse of Homer Barron, and comment that "for a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. […] what was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay" (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 130). Even more grotesque, they find a long strand of iron-gray hair on the pillow next to his remains. "One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair" (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 130). The short story ends with this last sentence, narrated in the first-person plural.

It is not easy to classify Faulkner's work, although it would be helpful to observe the predominance of the use of first-person narration in *A Rose for Emily*. One of the readers' sources for direct statement of ideas are the comments of the first-person narrator, who, in this case, is someone outside the main action.

Fenson and Kritzer contribute to this by declaring that "the first-person narrator serves some dramatic purpose of the author" (1966, p. 73). It is evident, after the study of this short story, that the narrator in *A Rose for Emily* serves to represent and inform of the community's view of Miss Emily, "a view that is vital to our understanding of the story, but which is not to be confounded with Faulkner's own view and judgement of events and characters" (FENSON; KRITZER, 1966, p. 74). So the narrator can be perceived as being the voice of the average citizen in the town of Jefferson.

The point of view in this story is unique. It is told by an unnamed narrator in the first-person collective. There are hints as to the age and class of the narrator, but an identity is never actually revealed. What becomes clear, however, is the fact that the narrator speaks for

his/her community. S/he proves to be a clever, humorous, and sympathetic storyteller. S/he is clever because of the way s/he pieces the story together to build a shocking climax. His/her sense of humor becomes evident in the almost whimsical tone throughout what most would consider a morbid tale. Finally, the narrator is sympathetic to both Emily and the town of Jefferson. This is demonstrated in his/her pity for Emily and in the understanding that the town's reactions are driven by circumstances beyond its control.

Using the same word quoted from Fenson and Kritzer in the previous chapters, "manipulation", it is fascinating to see how Faulkner manipulated the point of view of the narrator in this short story. The reader is led to some conclusions based on the accounts remembered by a nameless narrator; s/he is left in the dark because of the lack of information and the frequent flashbacks. The meaning is constructed without a chronological order. This way the final scene strikes the reader with surprise. In other words, Faulkner's use of point of view suggests his intention to cause impact on the reading public. The narrator's knowledge and experience is partial, so is the reader's.

Is there only one point of view? It is possible to see some shifting in the point of view presented in this short story. Examining the beginning of the story, the narrator's point of view could be associated with someone who is young and easily influenced. In this section, the narrator is truly impressed by Miss Emily and her arrogant and aristocratic behavior, by demonstrating "a sort of respectful affection" towards her.

Later on, in section IV, the narrator tells the story from the perspective of someone who is as old as Miss Emily. From this point of view every important detail of what she has done during her lifetime is related.

> Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow grayer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows - she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house - like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from generation to generation - dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse. (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 128)

Finally, in section V, the narrator tells Emily's bizarre story in a compassionate and sympathetic way. "Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it" (FAULKNER, 1995, p. 129). It seems as if the narrator could be a person who grew old with her.

However, these considerations as to the age of the narrator are not so relevant. What really matters is the tone of the lines spoken by this "we" narrator, which reveal his/her change of mind regarding Miss Emily throughout the narrative.

Apparently the narrator speaks for the town, making judgments against and for Miss Emily. By presenting this short story in random parts, the writer challenges the reader. As it has been shown here, at least three different perspectives are presented through the use of point of view in this short story. Traditionally, *A Rose for Emily* would be, and it has been, classified as a first-person narrative. However, that is not enough. Faulkner's text deserves a special analysis.

Although it has been said that a limited point of view distances the reader from the story, Faulkner's point of view actually creates an atmosphere of closeness between the reader and the story. By using the "we" narrator, that effect is accomplished.

I do not intend to imply that traditional terminology should be abolished but I would rather say that it fails to adequately describe all narratives. As it has already been mentioned in the previous chapters, classifying a story is not essential; what is really crucial is realizing how the point of view influences the reader's understanding of it. *A Rose for Emily* is a rich example of how the understanding of the story can be manipulated by the use of point of view. First, Miss Emily's pride and strength are emphasized; second, her aloofness; finally, through the filter of a shifting point of view, both the horror and the repulsion of her actions are reduced.

Through the use of point of view, Faulkner allows the reader to infer the negative image of a decadent and corrupt aristocracy. A great deal of the power from this story has got to do with the fact that so much of it has to be inferred from what is implicit in it, just like the skeleton within Miss Emily's house.

This demonstrates the importance of the narrator's point of view shifting in Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*. This use of point of view, which has been very difficult to be classified, can shape other elements in the short story selected. For instance, the thematic significance of this particular use of point of view highlights the problematic position of the narrator in relation to time. Since it is his/her point of view that presents different perspectives throughout the narrative, what he narrates also suffers the effects of time. While the look from the past idealizes, the look from the present criticizes, sometimes even with a gothic touch. There is nostalgia for the decadence of a class, but also a strong critique, even guilt for its own idealization. Another characteristic to consider regarding this narrator is that his/her voice is anchored in an oral tradition. He uses "we" to seek legitimacy to the story s/he narrates.

3.2. *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

3.2.1. *Absalom, Absalom!* and its critics

With the rise of the modern/modernist novel, the question of *what* is being narrated became less important than *how* it is narrated. In 1936, William Faulkner published *Absalom, Absalom!*[41], a novel which is emblematic[42] of this emphasis on narrative handling, as it is possible to see in the following excerpt from Scholes and Kellogg's *The Nature of Narrative*,

> In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner, more than any of these [modern/ist] writers, has experimented with […] point of view. In his freest and most imaginative treatment of the problem he has simply ridden roughshod over the question of verisimilitude and presented characters […] revealing themselves directly in a way which cannot be accounted for in realistic terms. (1966, p. 262)

Cleanth Brooks states that *Absalom, Absalom!* is, in his opinion "the greatest of Faulkner's novels," but it "is probably the least well understood of all his books" (1966, p. 186). One of the causes for this problem in understanding may be the way narrative works in this novel.

Only about a year after Cleanth Brooks' remarks, James Guetti writes "that the gap between experience and meaning in this novel must remain unbridgeable, and that the narrative is only, after all, words" (p. 81). According to his reading, the novel becomes the demonstration of the inadequacy of its own medium, because the passing of meaning from one subject to another is impossible. He is interested mainly in the space and time distance between the facts – what he calls the "meaning" – of the Sutpen history, and its various narrators.

Guetti's words indicate that the impossibilities or difficulties in knowing and telling the Sutpen history may be the conditions for the opportunity of the way narrative functions in this novel. Guetti points to uncertainty as a motivation for the construction of narratives by saying that "each attempt to understand, each vision, arises out of a moment of failure" (p.

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[41] My source is an edition of *Absalom, Absalom!* published in 1990 by Vintage Books. It follows the text as corrected in 1986, based on a comparison - under the direction of Noel Polk - of the first edition, Faulkner's holograph manuscript, the typed setting copy, and the working galley proofs. Hereafter cited in my text as *AA*.

[42] Criticism on Faulkner is extensive; therefore here I merely start the discussion with some highly influential critics.

80). The intensity of telling and listening here is creative intensity, because it cannot completely be merely reporting, it is creating. *Absalom, Absalom!* insists on the impossibility of achieving historical truth, Guetti's "meaning", but it does not support this as a failure. It offers an alternate view of the narrative process, within which it implies a dynamic substitute for the communication of facts.

It is necessary to understand the importance of the orality of telling and listening in the novel in order to understand this concept. The characters of *Absalom, Absalom!*, when narrating, are not writers but oral storytellers, just like the narratees are not readers but listeners:

> It did not matter (and possibly neither of them conscious of the distinction) which one had been doing the talking. So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over frozen December ruts of that Christmas eve: four of them and then just two – Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry, the two of them both believing that Henry was thinking *He* (meaning his father) *has destroyed us all....* (*AA*, p. 267)

The creation of the narrative by the speaker in *Absalom, Absalom!* is simultaneous with its experience by the hearer. That is why it makes sense, in the above cited passage, "it did not matter […] which one had been doing the talking." Both figures, the teller and the listener, are engaged in storytelling; their minds move as one with the sound of the language of the narrative,

> 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 rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere (*AA*, p. 243)

Regarding this, Caleb Smith raises the issue of "a unison of motion," because there is no congruence between meaning on one part and understanding on the other. He defends that there is a fantasy of oral narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!*; Smith even argues that the novel offers "a fantasy of communion" based on a unison of motion in time.

"There was no harm intended by Shreve and no harm taken, since Quentin did not even stop. He did not even falter, taking Shreve up in stride without comma or colon or paragraph" (*AA*, p. 225). Here I see Quentin and Shreve joined in what it is called the "happy marriage of speaking and hearing" by John Matthews. This allows them to transcend the problem of stasis associated with written forms.

As long as they continue to tell and listen interchangeably, this "unison" liberates them from the stillness of the closed sentence and the failed attempt to make permanent meaning.

The prose in *Absalom, Absalom!* is constantly attempting to create for itself this same kind of liberation.

Regarding his creative effort, Faulkner has been compared to Antaeus, a Greek mythological figure that was able to fight only with his feet on the ground:

> Faulkner, like Antaeus, could fight only with his feet on the ground – on home ground; he had to work toward meaning through the complexity and specificity of a literal world in which he knew his way about, as a man knows his way about his own house without thinking how he gets from one room to another; only in that world could he find the seminal images that would focus his deepest feelings into vision. And this process implies something about the kind of meaning, and kind of glory, he would assume possible in life; […] an idea any novelist has that does not come with some tang of experience, some earth yet clinging to the roots, or at least one drop of blood dripping from it, has no virtue for a novelist. (WARREN, p. 17)

The weakness of the Greek mythological figure takes on a new meaning and Robert Penn Warren praises it in relation to Faulkner, who profited from using his local experience.

Another critic, John Pikoulis, puts it, "the myth of the South came to activate his imagination, grounding his feelings in a context and suggesting a method that could do justice to them by being indulgent and indirectly critical at the same time" (p. 1). Pikoulis directs his remark to *Sartoris*, but it holds true to any of the Yoknapatawpha stories.

In his book called *William Faulkner: the Yoknapatawpha country*, first published in 1963, reprinted in 1990, Cleanth Brooks affirms that the South provided Faulkner "with a vantage point from which to criticize, directly or perhaps merely by implication, the powerful metropolitan culture" (p. 1). By reading closely Pikoulis and Brooks' statements, it is possible to see two directions of what they call Faulkner's ambivalence. First, towards the Southern experience; second, towards the modernized culture.

Richard Pearce, in his work *The politics of narration* (1991), further elaborates on Faulkner's ambivalence, saying that it is also reflected in the "complex politics of narration that evolve in his major novels" (p. 77-8). He examines Faulkner's authorial voice as being a "hovering presence" and that it is "ambivalent, troubled, searching, sometimes echoing, sometimes holding back, but never quite giving way to the storytelling voices of his characters" (p. 78). His main argument is that Faulkner's authorial voice is a source of narrative patterning. Faulkner gives his storytellers different degrees of power and credibility, while even denying some of his major characters[43] the chance to tell their stories.

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[43] For example, Caddie in *The Sound and the Fury*, and Addie in *As I Lay Dying*. As a matter of fact, Addie gets a chance to tell her story, but only after she is dead. And she has to compete with the other fifteen storytellers, who alternate in telling the story of her death and burial.

Nevertheless, *Absalom, Absalom!* is a novel that has plenty of narrating. Since Faulkner's narratives clearly demonstrate that the understanding of reality is contingent upon multiple points of view, *Absalom, Absalom!* is no exception. The differences between versions of the same story can be sometimes contraditory, but this is what places the reader in the position of a listener who must reconcile the fragments of the stories told, a position[44] just like Quentin's, among other characters, who take turns telling and listening to stories throughout this novel.

3.2.2. Point of view and the problematic of narration

The story of Sutpen undergoes revision and change as it is told and retold, sometimes unpredictably, sometimes designedly. The past is recreated in its relationship to the present, so it is important to highlight that in Faulkner's novel, even though the past dominates the present, there is no fixed version of it. What I find in his text are storytellers reconstructing events from individual and collective memory, in a fragmentary, discontinuous and repetitious form. This demonstrates the way Faulkner is aware of the fact that the past can only be glimpsed or evoked momentarily, so it can be imagined or constituted only partially, never as a whole.

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the past comes alive through the memories and most notably through the stories exchanged between Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, Quentin, and Shreve, who collect the "rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking" (*AA*, p. 243). They take turns telling the story of Thomas Sutpen, and in each turn Sutpen's rise and fall is depicted with a different *colouring*. Here, I make the same distinction as Mieke Bal does, that is, distinguishing between linguistic agents and the purpose of their activity, because only the narrator narrates. The focalizor is an aspect of the story the narrator tells, "[it] is the represented 'colouring' of the fabula by a specific agent of perception, the holder of the 'point of view.'"(BAL, p. 19, 1997).

Absalom, Absalom! is a novel divided into nine chapters. The initial chapter has a teller, Rosa Coldfield, who is one surviving eyewitness to the past, and a listener, Quentin. Therefore, right from the beginning there is a storytelling situation, where Rosa is doing the telling, "in that grim haggard amazed voice until at last listening would renege and hearing-

[44] A result of the influence of the oral tradition that is evidenced by Faulkner's frequent use of oral storytelling frames in his fiction.

sense self-confound and the long dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration would appear, as though by outraged recapitulation evoked" (*AA*, p. 3). This description sets the tone for all of Rosa's narrating, that is, an evocation through outraged recapitulation. I believe this applies to much of the storytelling in the novel, where there is a need not only to remember, but also to repeat the past in an effort to work through it, from motives that are highly charged emotionally.

In the early pages of *Absalom, Absalom!* the reader finds an important part of Rosa's narrative,

> I saw what had happened to Ellen, my sister. I saw her almost a recluse, watching those two doomed children growing up whom she was helpless to save. I saw the price which she had paid for that house and that pride; I saw the notes of hand on pride and contentment and peace and all to which she had put her signature when she walked into the church that night, begin to fall due in sucession. I saw Judith's marriage forbidden without rhyme or reason or shadow of excuse; I saw Ellen die with only me, a child, to turn to and ask to protect her remaining child; I saw Henry repudiate his home and birthright and then return and practically fling the bloody corpse of his sister's sweetheart at the hem of her wedding gown; I saw that man return – the evil's source and head which had outlasted all its victims – who had created two children not only to destroy one another and his own line, but my line as well, yet I agreed to marry him. (*AA*, p. 12)

This fragment offers what could be called a summary of the story, in fact, it gives virtually the whole of the story to be told, from the point of view of Rosa Coldfield. There is the insistent veracity of the eyewitness account demonstrated with the repetition of "I saw [...] I saw [...]". However, her account does not provide enough clues as to how and even why Quentin, or the reader for that matter, should look for meaning in it. There is no apparent structure of meaning for this sequence of events. As it happens throughout the novel, there is narrative aplenty[45], but inadequate grounds for narrative.

Quentin does not know why he has been chosen as Rosa's narratee. Thus, from the outset there is an interrogation of the motive and intention of telling.

> *It's because she wants it told* he thought, *so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who will never have heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War* (*AA*, p. 6).

Here, Quentin's explanation leaps to the level of history, to the fabula as something truly fabulous: the epic of the Civil War, the tragedy of Southern history. In fact, it leaps over

[45] Peter Brooks suggests that Rosa's passage opens a possibility for generalization, "it characterizes not only a problem *in* the narrative, but the very problem *of* narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!*, where ultimately narrative itself is the problem" (p. 290).

the expected formulation of the storyteller's intention in terms of the coherent design given to her story by its shaping plot. The war and the history of the South may in some sense be both the final principle of explanation for everyone in the novel, and the final problem needing explanation. By the close of the first chapter, as Brooks suggests, "there is a split and a polarization: narrating on the one hand, an epic historical story on the other, and no narrative plot or design to join them" (BROOKS, 1992, p. 294). The narrative of *Absalom, Absalom!* raises issues such as how one can construct the plot, who can say it, to whom, on what authority.

As a matter of fact, the novel actively pursues these issues by making the mystery – the object of investigation – the narrative design, or plot, itself. This problem develops in chapters two, three, and four, where Mr. Compson is telling. Mr. Compson is the figure of transmission. He stands between his father, General Compson, the closest thing to a friend that Sutpen had in Jefferson, and his son Quentin. Mr. Compson's version provides some of the background necessary to put together Sutpen's story, such as the latter's arrival in Jefferson, his marriage to Ellen Coldfield, Judith and Henry's birth, the appearance of Charles Bon. At the end of chapter three, there is the evocation of Wash Jones showing up at Rosa's house to tell of Henry's shooting of Bon. Chapter four ends with the same moment, but this time Wash Jones's message is fully articulated, "Henry has done shot that durn French feller. Kilt him dead as a beef" (*AA*, p. 106). These two chapter endings force the reader to ask what has happened in the intervening pages to advance the understanding of this killing, which is a shocking challenge to understanding based on the initial presentation of the elements of the story told by Rosa and previously mentioned here.

In chapters two, three, and four, Mr. Compson elaborates a plot that involves Henry, Bon, and Judith. Being a rich scenarist, Mr. Compson imagines the meeting of Henry and Bon at the University of Mississippi, Henry's trip to New Orleans, and so on. It is a narrative that makes the reader-listener-narratee pass from merely wondering how it must have been to the conviction that it really was that way. For example, when Mr. Compson imagines the introduction of Henry to Bon, he does so in a series of clauses headed with the word "perhaps," ending with the following excerpt, "or perhaps (I like to think this) presented formally to the man reclining in a flowered, almost feminised gown, in a sunny window in his chambers" (*AA*, p. 76). Then, some lines later, Mr. Compson turns the hypothesis into solid narrative event, as the following excerpt illustrates, "And the very fact that, lounging before them in the outlandish and almost feminine garments of his sybaritic privacy" (*AA*, p. 76).

Still, Mr. Compson displays moments of radical doubt, as can be noted in the passage that follows,

> It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they dont explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sounds to us like Sanskrit or Chocktaw; we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable – Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old 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 (*AA*, p. 80).

The aforementioned excerpt, which alludes to all the enigmatic issues of the narrative, poses again the problem of narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!*, with Mr. Compson generalizing the problem. Moreover, it demonstrates how Mr. Compson appears to get the story of Henry and Bon all wrong. Even though it is a complex plot, seemingly highly motivated, Mr. Compson manages to include some very important clues hidden in his mistaken design. For example, first, the matter of incest is suggested in the relation of Judith and Henry, that is, in the vicarious incest Henry would enjoy in Bon's marriage to Judith, whom Mr. Compson does not suspect to be related by blood, and second, the issue of miscegenation is presented by the very existence of the octoroon woman. These are latent figures of narrative design which will only get a chance to be activated and understood later on.

I mentioned Mr. Compson's allusion to the issues of the narrative that are enigmatic, but I would like to exemplify them. At this point in the novel, Mr. Compson's narrative triggers questions such as why Henry Sutpen kills Charles Bon, what this killing has to do with Thomas Sutpen, and with the eventual ruin of the house of Sutpen. What does this tale of the ancestors have to do with the present generations? Moreover, how can narrative know what happened and make sense of the motives of events? And if it cannot, what happens to lines of descent, to the transmission of knowledge and wisdom, and to history itself? Is history finally simply a "bloody mischancing of human affairs"?

There is a return to Rosa's telling in chapter five, and the aproach to the moment of murder is nearer. She says, "I heard an echo, but not the shot" (*AA*, p. 121), in a phrase that could be considered emblematic of her relation to narrative event: one of secondariness and bafflement. Her narrating takes the narratee precisely to what she did not see and cannot tell – the confrontation of Judith and Henry over Bon's corpse. Her listener, Quentin, is left with the task of imagining the dialogue of sister and brother. And this need to tell will provide Quentin's entry into the narrative structure of the novel more directly than will Rosa's revelation that there is someone other than Clytie currently living at Sutpen's Hundred:

> the two of them, brother and sister […] speaking to one another in short brief staccato sentences like slaps […]
>
> *Now you cant marry him.*
>
> *Why cant I marry him?*
>
> *Because he's dead.*
>
> *Dead?*
>
> *Yes. I killed him.*
>
> He (Quentin) couldn't pass that. He was not even listening to her; he said, "Ma'am? What's that? What did you say?"
>
> "There's something in that house."
>
> "In that house? It's Clytie. Dont she –"
>
> "No. Something living in it. Hidden in it. It has been out there for four years, living hidden in that house." (*AA*, pp. 139-40)

This is how Quentin finds out that "something", who is living in the house, is Henry Sutpen. When, just a few hours after this exchange with Rosa, Quentin meets him, it is possibly the most important event of the story that needs telling in *Absalom, Absalom!* However, the portrayal of this event is postponed to the very last pages of the book. What is possible to notice here, at the close of Rosa's narrative, is the way the narratee Quentin cannot "pass" and appears to be fixed on just one moment of the narrator's account. By doing this, he seems to imply that Rosa has not done justice to this instant, so it is up to Quentin to pursue its narrative implications and consequences.

The narrating voice is basically Quentin's from chapter six through the end of the novel. Even though his narratee is Shreve, this latter comes to participate in the narrating to such an extent that he also must eventually be considered a narrator[46]. Referring to Gérard

[46] One hesitates to label him, or any other of the tellers, a "narrator" in the traditional sense, since narration here as elsewhere in Faulkner seems to call upon both the individual's voice and that transindividual voice that speaks through all of Faulkner's tellers. Certainly the narrative is "focalized" by an individual – to use Genette's

Genette's categories, *histoire*, *récit*, and *narration* – "story," "plot," and "narrating" for Peter Brooks – if "Quentin enters the Sutpen *story* through the meeting with Henry at Sutpen's Hundred, he enters the *narrative* on the plane of *narrating*, as the better artist of the narrative plot" (BROOKS, p. 296). Mieke Bal makes use of the following classification, "text," "fabula," and "story": "If one regards the text primarily as the product of the use of a medium, and the fabula primarily as the product of imagination, the story could be regarded as the result of an ordering" (BAL, 1991, p. 78).

Quentin and Shreve de-authorize the eye-witness account, that is, Rosa's, and the account at one remove, which is Mr. Compson's, in favor of something at a greater temporal and spatial distance. As source for their narrative, first of all, there is something that can be considered "documentary evidence." Mr. Compson's letter frames chapters six through nine, and it recounts Rosa's death and burial. Earlier, Mr. Compson had shown Quentin the letter Judith had given Quentin's grandmother, the letter that Charles Bon wrote to Judith in 1865.

Secondly, there are the five tombstones that Quentin and his father come upon while out shooting quail at Sutpen's Hundred. Ellen's and Sutpen's were ordered from Italy and brought home by Sutpen in 1864. Charles Bon's tombstone was bought by Judith when she sold the store. Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon's was paid for partly by Judith, partly by General Compson, and erected by the latter. Judith's tombstone was provided by Rosa. The fourth tombstone mentioned here is the one that bears the clue, the enigmatic text. It is that of Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, who is Charles Bon's child by the octoroon woman, who looks white but chooses blackness. He takes a black wife, and their child will be the idiot Jim Bond. At this point, we still do not know that, in fact, he has black ancestry in both his mother and his father.

But what appears to be more important than the documentary evidence is oral transmission. Quentin's main source of knowledge comes from what Sutpen told his grandfather, General Compson, during the hunt for the French architect. And then on another occasion thirty years later, when he came to General Compson's office, a narrative which General Compson passed on to Mr. Compson, who passed it on to Quentin. However this narrative lacks meaning until it is retroactively completed by what Quentin himself learns from his visit to Sutpen's Hundred with Rosa in 1909:

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terminology again – but the question of voice is more difficult to resolve. Gérard Genette offers an important corrective to traditional Anglo-American studies of narrative "point of view" by distinguishing "focalization" (the consciousness that takes in the narrative) from "voice" (the discourse that tells the narrative).

> "Your father," Shreve said. "He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick, after having waited forty-five years. If he knew all this, what was his reason for telling you that the trouble between Henry and Bon was the octoroon woman?"
>
> "He didn't know it then. Grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it."
>
> "Then who did tell him?"
>
> "I did." Quentin did not move, did not look up while Shreve watched him. "The day after we – after that night when we –"
>
> "Oh," Shreve said. "After you and the old aunt. I see." (*AA*, p. 214)

Again the reason for telling is an issue, along with the matter of authority. This conversation marks the supersession of Mr. Compson's, General Compson's, even Sutpen's own narratives in favor of Quentin's. Because Quentin can supply essential "delayed information" that was previously missing, his narrative is constructed with retroactive explanatory force. The nature of this information is further specified a few pages later:

> "Your old man," Shreve said. "When your grandfather was telling this to him, he didn't know any more what your grandfather was talking about than your grandfather knew what the demon was talking about when the demon told it to him, did he? And when your old man told it to you, you wouldn't have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn't been out there and seen Clytie. Is that right?"
>
> "Yes," Quentin said. (*AA*, p. 220)

Thus, this information comes simply from seeing Clytie, it does not come from anything Quentin has read or been told[47]. Right here, a decisive clue serves as an alert to the narrators – and readers – of the significant strain of miscegenation. Clytie is a Negro Sutpen, and her identity opens the possibility of other part-Negro Sutpen children. In addition, it sets a model of narrative repetition which allows Quentin and Shreve to see the way Henry and Bon act out Sutpen's script. Quentin is the one who can propose the essential discovery: that Charles Bon was also Sutpen's child, and that he was part Negro too.

The verbal game in *Absalom, Absalom!* reveals the need to tell, the urgency to narrate. Still, each and every one of the narrators has a particular way of doing it. Looking into Shreve's participation more closely and taking him as an example, he cannot be considered merely a narratee. Nor is his contribution irrelevant, with just a sarcastic or sometimes ironic touch. In fact, Shreve narrates an important part of the second half of the novel: a large part of

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[47] As a matter of fact, in chapter Five, Rosa had already mentioned Clytie to Quentin saying that "*in the very pigmentation of her flesh represented that debacle which had brought Judith and me to what we were*" (*AA*, p. 126), but Quentin was not paying attention, he "was not even listening to her" (*AA,* p. 140).

chapter six, almost all of chapter eight, and the beginning and the end of chapter nine. According to textual evidence, he is an unreliable narrator who embodies the narrative strategy of the novel.

Wayne Booth is responsible for the definition of unreliable narrator, and also for establishing the difference between reliable and unreliable narration, "For lack of better terms, I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (BOOTH, pp. 158-9). Thus, Shreve articulates this narration against "the norms of the work" throughout his discourse in *Absalom, Absalom!*, particularly with the way he organizes the events in the course of narration, and also by inventing and transforming characters and events.

I do not see the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* as being unreliable equally. In order to clarify my point, I would like to use Greta Olson's distinction[48] between "fallible" and "untrustworthy" narrators. The former does not narrate accurately or does not explain more because s/he is biased or has a limited perspective. The latter is usually aware of her or his act, and manipulates or distorts the story, often for personal benefit, whatever that might be. Based on Olson's distinction, I consider Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, and Quentin to be fallible narrators because they attempt to reach the truth by articulating only the information they have, even though they will never reach the truth because their knowledge is incomplete. Their expressions of doubt and the impossibility of getting to the truth of the story make these narrators appear honest to the reader, even when they are clearly limited to subjective perspective and personal experience.

Shreve, in contrast to other narrators, holds a conception of telling a story that attends only to internal logic and personal pleasure. He openly favors plausibility instead of the aim of veracity in his narration. Although it is impossible to comprehend and fully understand, the other narrators have presented their version of the story as a true story. Thus, Shreve's manipulative attitude toward what has already been told makes him not only an unreliable narrator, but also an untrustworthy one.

His organization and development of the plot expose him as an unreliable narrator. Sutpen's story is told in an order established according to Shreve's personal interest, selecting scenes and characters that are not given so much importance in previous versions of the story. He is concerned in constructing a logical sequence so that the enigmas that appear in the other

[48] Departing from Booth's suggestion and Ansgar Nunning's first differentiation, Greta Olson distinguishes between "fallible" and "untrustworthy" narrators.

narratives are solved. Discourse is organized in a way that shows how Shreve is self-conscious of his role as narrator. Moreover, the elements he decides to focus on help Shreve create a plot line and then be able to give a moral interpretation that would not be deduced from earlier versions.

Quentin's Canadian roommate's narration first focuses on a scene that involves Jim Bond and Clytie, after a condensed summary at the beginning of chapter six. After the tombstones episode, Shreve introduces Jim Bond into the novel for the first time. Is it a casual matter that the first and the last character that Shreve's discourse focuses on is the last Sutpen alive, "negro", idiot, Jim Bond?

> "And that was the one Luster was talking about now," Shreve said. "And your father watching you again because you hadn't heard the name before, hadn't even thought that he must have a name that day when you saw him in the vegetable patch, and you said, 'Who? Jim what?' and Luster said, 'Das him. Bright-colored boy whut say wid dat ole woman' and your father still watching you and said, 'Spell it' and Luster said, 'Dat's a lawyer word. Whut dey puts you under when de Law ketches you. I des spells readin words.' And that was him, the name Bond now and he wouldn't care about that, who had inherited what he was from his mother and only what he could never have been from his father, and if your father had asked him if he was Charles Bon's son he not only would not have known either, he wouldn't have cared: and if you had told him he was, it would have touched and then vanished from what you (not he) would have had to call his mind long before it could have set up any kind of reaction at all, either of pride or pleasure, anger or grief?" (*AA*, p. 174)

It is not such a casual matter that the first and the last character that Shreve's discourse focuses on is the idiot Jim Bond, the last Sutpen alive. Shreve is aware that this enables him to conclude his narrative with a moral and rather racist message later on.

The way Shreve responds to Quentin's silence, in chapter seven, after he has mentioned Sutpen's marriage in the West Indies, is by prompting Quentin with "All right," and then "Go on" (*AA*, p. 205). But Quentin attempts to justify himself and says that Sutpen stopped telling his past to Grandfather Compson at this point. Quentin does not tell what he does not know, a condition for narrative that Shreve does not share. And this criterion is seen in his following interventions in order to conduct Quentin's narrative,

> "Quentin ceased. At once Shreve said, "All right. Dont bother to say he stopped now; just go on." But Quentin did not continue at once – the flat, curiously dead voice, the downcast face, the relaxed body not stirring except to breathe; the two of them not moving except to breathe, both young, both born within the same year: the one in Alberta, the other in Mississippi […]. "Just dont bother," Shreve said. "Just get on with it." (*AA*, p. 208)

When Shreve sees that Quentin does not follow his prompting, the former insists upon his own idea about the plot:

> "Sure," Shreve said. "That's fine. But Sutpen. The design. Get on now." (*AA*, p. 209)

And a little bit further, Shreve interferes again, "But go on. Sutpen's children. Go on." (*AA*, p. 210) However, as Quentin does not move to Sutpen's children, Shreve tries to speed up the narrative: "All right," he said. "So that Christmas Henry brought him home, into the house, and the demon looked up and saw the face he believed he had paid off and discharged twenty-eight years ago. Go on." (*AA*, p. 213) As it is possible to see in these fragments from chapter seven, Shreve's participation in his roommate's narrative conveys impatience to listen as well as excitement to tell the story himself.

Moving on to chapter eight, if I consider it is told from Shreve's perspective; it offers plenty of textual evidence that he is an unreliable narrator. He begins by focusing on the library episode, when Sutpen told Henry something that forced him to renounce his birthright and run away with Charles Bon. Shreve decides what Sutpen said to Henry in this first encounter: that Charles Bon was his son and, this way, his marriage to Judith would be incestuous. Of course Shreve's claim is not absent of meaning. Their next meeting in the camp during the Civil War would need a more powerful argument to make Henry decide to kill Bon, given this setting and with bigamy discarded as a possible reason. It is here that race replaces incest as the key concern. However, in his narration, Quentin does not state what Sutpen told Henry in those decisive meetings because neither he nor his father knows. Shreve, on the other hand, continues his narration focusing on the character of Charles Bon, of whom nobody has told anything apart from describing his external appearance, nor deduced anything from the couple of occasions he visited Jefferson. From this point on, Shreve takes Bon to the center of the story and develops the plot according to this character's life and action. He thus redistributes roles in Sutpen's story. He tells the story but limits himself to what Bon sees and thinks, though what he sees and thinks is Shreve's speculation, his supposition, his invention.

Shreve's discourse has signs of his self-conscious guiding of the plot, "And now," Shreve said, "we're going to talk about love." (*AA*, p. 253) When Quentin does not agree with aspects of Shreve's story, Shreve tries to persuade him to approve his version. For example, when Quentin claims love between Bon and Judith, Shreve undermines the claim by saying

> "[…] *She would be easy* like when you have left the champagne on the supper table and are walking toward the whiskey on the sideboard and you

> happen to pass a cup of lemon sherbet on a tray and you look at the sherbet and tell yourself, That would be easy too only who wants it. – Does that suit you?" (*AA*, p. 258)

And further, "It would be like if God had got Jesus born and saw that He had the carpenter tools and then never gave Him anything to build with them. Dont you believe that?" (*AA*, p. 259) These last two excerpts highlight Shreve's interest in fitting everything together. He is concerned with cause and effect rather than with the truth. By recalling Rosa's words: "the old dame, the Aunt Rosa, told you about how there are some things that just have to be whether they are or not" (*AA*, p. 258), Shreve makes his case based on what logically could have happened, not with what happened.

Following Henry and Bon's departure from Sutpen's Hundred and their trip to New Orleans, Shreve focuses on the Civil War episodes from the inner perspective of a Bon he depicts as being obsessed with getting Sutpen's acknowledgment of him as his son. Through the lens of his need for this recognition, Shreve tells of Charles Bon and Sutpen's encounter at the bivouac.

Even though Chapter nine is not dominated by Shreve's narration, it ends with his intervention to narrate the burning of Sutpen's Hundred. The last character that Shreve's discourse focuses on is Jim Bond, who is used by Shreve to embody the destiny of the white race. According to Shreve, this destiny consists of the destruction of white pureness and white supremacy by the fruits of miscegenation, sons and daughters of blacks, "the Jim Bonds" who "are going to conquer the western hemisphere" (*AA*, p. 302).

The way Shreve organizes the sequence of events in his narrative enables him to conclude with a racist discourse. At the beginning, his decision that the first reason Sutpen gives Henry to stop his marriage is that it would be incestuous; and the second reason, prompted by the first, that it would be miscegenation. These deductions that Shreve makes from the story of Sutpen are so influential that they corner Quentin,

> "Do you want to know what I think?"
>
> "No," Quentin said. "Then I'll tell you. I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it wont quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they wont 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. Now I want you to tell me just one thing more. Why do you hate the South?"
>
> "I dont hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I dont hate it," he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron

> New England dark: *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!* (*AA*, pp. 302-3)

In fact, Shreve's racist discourse brings Quentin to a dead end, to the desperation expressed in Quentin's last sentence, which is in the last paragraph of the novel.

Shreve's unreliable discourse is characterized by invention, that is, he transforms characters and events as he tells the story. Since narrators tell stories according to their limited knowledge, an objective version does not appear in the novel. Faulkner himself[49] warned against this impossibility of any individual to see the truth "intact", as he explained in the conferences he held at the University of Virginia in 1957 and 1958, while he was Writer-in-Residence there (BLOTNER; GWYNN, 1995, p. 273). Still, Mr. Compson and Quentin Compson usually provide the sources for their information. Rosa has experienced what she tells, thus, she is her own source. Even when there is no direct information, these narrators indicate those enigmas of the story they cannot solve. Shreve does not. He is not accurate about his sources, disapproves of them, and he never accepts a gap. Imagination and fantasy are his tools when he needs to make the story more logical or emotive.

Quentin, on the other hand, relies on memory, rather than imagination. One excerpt from *Absalom, Absalom!* can help illustrate how present the human acts of remembering, talking and listening are in Faulkner's work. In this novel, refered to as "a drama of incessant voices" by David Minter, Quentin's experience comes to him as strange and familiar, new and old.

> But you were not listening, because you knew it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will and do: so that what

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[49] The warning I refer to here is taken from the following excerpt of one of the thirty seven conferences, first published in 1959:

> "Q. Mr. Faulkner, in *Absalom, Absalom!* does any of the people who talks about Sutpen have the right view, or is it more or less a case of thirteen ways of looking at a black-bird with none of them right?
> A. That's it exactly. I think that no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it. Someone else looks at it and sees a slightly awry phase of it. But taken all together, the truth is in what they saw though nobody saw the truth intact." (GWYNN; BLOTNER, 1995, p. 273)

Other segments are also related to *Absalom, Absalom!* For instance,

> "Q. How much of the story of *Absalom, Absalom!* is reconstructed by Shreve and Quentin? How does the reader know which to accept as objective truth and which to consider just a [reflection] of their personalities?
> A. Well, the story was told by Quentin to Shreve. Shreve was the commentator that held the thing to something of reality. If Quentin had been let alone to tell it, it would have become completely unreal. It had to have a solvent to keep it real, keep it believable, creditable, otherwise it would have vanished into smoke and fury." (GWYNN; BLOTNER, 1995, p. 75)

> your father was saying did not tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant strings of remembering (*AA*, p. 172)

Quentin has grown up with a lot of stories, so all knowing for him begins with remembering and depends upon talking. The stories that come to Quentin, word by word, to strike "the resonant strings of remembering," provide the only access he has to his cultural heritage. In addition, as it has been noted, "they become the only means he has of moving beyond the dangerous desires and the harsh judgments that memory and knowledge arouse within him" (MINTER, p. 81). While he hears, repeats, and seeks to finish stories, they become the only means he has of entering, absorbing, appropriating, assimilating his culture.

3.2.3. Quentin as a storyteller

Not only do the identities of important characters appear to be in question, but even the discourse about identity lacks authority in *Absalom, Absalom!* There seems to be no clear authority, not even of a provisional sort, for the telling of the story. And I see that this apparent absence – or lack – of authority problematizes the understanding of the Sutpen story, which concerns fathers, sons, generation, and lines of descent. As Quentin thinks, in just one of the several considerations on the issue of paternity, "*Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us*" (*AA*, p. 210). Quentin and Shreve recount the story of Sutpen, in the first instance, which appears as the necessary myth of origins of all the problems under consideration.

Sutpen's story itself concerns origins. "His trouble was innocence" (*AA*, p. 178), says the narrate-become-narrator Quentin who states this thematic summary of the story of Sutpen. Mainly filled in by Quentin in chapter seven, it is the story of a hillbilly boy who comes down from the mountains to the Tidewater with his family. Quentin tells what he has heard from his father, who heard it from his grandfather that Sutpen "didn't know why they moved, or didn't remember the reason if he ever knew it" (*AA*, p. 181). In fact, Quentin's narrative is full of references (in parenthesis) to the source of the story. For instance, in chapter seven, Quentin indicates that he is telling the same story Sutpen himself had told Quentin's grandfather,

> and that (so he told Grandfather) the men themselves had little to do with the choosing and less of the regret because (he told Grandfather this too) it had

> never once occurred to him that any man should take any blind accident as that as authority or warrant to look down at others, any others. (*AA*, p. 180)

There is little information about Sutpen's parents, and when it is provided, Quentin states it in an unsure way, "as if whatever slight hold the family had had (he said something to Grandfather about his mother dying about that time and how his pap said she was a fine wearying woman and that he would miss her; and something about how it was the wife that had got his father even far West) on the mountain had broken" (*AA*, p. 180).

An excerpt that demonstrates the use of the parenthesis to comment on the story that Quentin heard from his grandfather. And now he is repeating and reconstructing it to Shreve. The latter has space in the parentheses too:

> But he –" ("The demon," Shreve said) "didn't know, or remember, whether he had ever heard, been told, the reason or not. All he remembered was that one morning the father rose and told the older girls to pack what food they had, and somebody wrapped up the baby and somebody else threw water on the fire and walked down the mountain to where roads existed. (*AA*, p. 181)

So out of this blurry scenario, it is possible to see that Thomas Sutpen had brothers and sisters, but their names are not mentioned. Perhaps Sutpen did not tell Quentin's grandfather the whole story because he did not remember it, or simply because he did not want to. Or maybe Quentin's grandfather did the same when he told it to Quentin. It is difficult to get the story straight, and the narrative emphasizes that complexity: "He told Grandfather he did not remember" (*AA*, p. 181). "So he knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why" (*AA*, p. 184), in the words of Quentin, who seems to portray Sutpen's picture much more candidly than Rosa's narrative had done in the first chapters.

Quentin focuses on the question of Sutpen's innocence, when he tells of the time Sutpen is sent by his father to a plantation house with a message, only to be turned away from the front door and told to come round to the back. "Because he had not only not lost the innocence yet, he had not yet discovered that he possessed it. [...] He didn't even know he was innocent that day when his father sent him to the big house with a message" (*AA*, p. 185).

Quentin continues,

> He didn't remember (or did not say) what the message was, apparently he still didn't know exactly just what his father did, what work (or maybe supposed to do) the old man had in relation to the plantation – a boy either thirteen or fourteen, he didn't know which, in garments his father had got from the plantation commissary and had worn out and which one of the sisters had patched and cut down to fit him and he no more conscious of his appearance in them or of the possibility that anyone else would be than he was of his skin, following the road and turning into the gate and following the drive up past where still more niggers with nothing to do all day but plant

> flowers and trim grass were working, and so to the house, the portico, the front door, thinking how at last he was going to see the inside of it, see what else a man was bound to own who could have a special nigger to hand him his liquor and pull off his shoes that he didn't even need to wear, never for one moment thinking but what the man would be as pleased to show him the balance of his things as the mountain man would have been to show the powder horn and bullet mold that went with the rifle. Because he was still innocent. He knew it without being aware that he did; he told Grandfather how, before the monkey nigger who came to the door had finished saying what he did, he seemed to kind of dissolve and a part of him turn and rush back through the two years they had lived there like when you pass through a room fast and look at all the objects in it and you turn and go back through the room again and look at all the objects from the other side and you find out you had never seen them before, rushing back through those years two years and seeing a dozen things that had happened and he hadn't even seen them before: a certain flat level silent way his older sisters and the other white women of their kind had of looking at niggers, not with fear or dread but with a kind of speculative antagonism not because of any known fact or reason but inherited by both white and black, the sense, effluvium of it passing between the white women in the doors of the sagging cabins and the niggers in the road and which was not quite explainable by the fact that niggers had better clothes [...] (*AA*, pp. 185-6).

There is so much in this passage, yet it is told by Quentin as if he were the one remembering the event, which is a painful moment in Sutpen's life that is described almost poetically by Quentin's words. Does he feel sorry for Sutpen? Is Quentin trying to make sense of the story of Sutpen, finding a reason for so much resentment and thirst of power? According to Quentin's point of view, it is almost as if Thomas Sutpen had no other choice:

"All of a sudden he discovered, not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do, had to do it whether he wanted to or not, because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life" (*AA*, p. 178). In the story Quentin tells Shreve, Sutpen had to do all the things he did because there was no other way. After that moment of barred passage, Sutpen had no choice, he would have to do something in order to live with it.

This is also a significant moment because it is when Sutpen discovers the existence of difference. "He had learned the difference not only between white men and black ones, but he was learning that there was a difference between white men and white men not to be measured by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink then get up and walk out of the room" (*AA*, p. 183). Not only is there racial difference, but also social difference between men.

In this example, the difference is more important than the content of the message Sutpen was supposed to deliver. And the difference is symbolized by that between black and white, though this is but the most immediate and visible realization of a larger problem. A

basic problem whose primordial role the boy Sutpen is able to begin to understand in the organization and assignment of meaning.

A few pages earlier, Quentin had said that Sutpen "didn't even know there was a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it 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, 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 his hand or pulling off his boots for him to go to bed that all men have had to do for themselves since time began" (*AA*, p. 179-80). This way, Quentin gives emphasis to Sutpen's innocence and he sounds like a lawyer defending Sutpen most of the time.

Sutpen "had been told to go around the back door even before he could state his errand" (p. 188) and, throughout several pages in the chapter seven of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Quentin elaborates what went through Sutpen's mind so that he could make sense of what had happened to him.

> In fact, he had actually come on business, in the good faith of business which he had believed that all men accepted. Of course he had not expected to be invited in to eat a meal […]; perhaps he had not expected to be asked into the house at all. But he did expect to be listened to because he had come, been sent, on some business which, even though he didn't remember what it was and maybe at the time (he said) he might not even have comprehended, was certainly connected somehow with the plantation that supported and endured that smooth white brass-decorated door and the very broadcloth and linen and silk stockings the monkey nigger stood in to tell him to go around to the back before he could even state the business. (*AA*, pp. 188-9)

In Quentin's eyes, Sutpen does not have enough experience to understand right away what had happened to him. "[…] if there were only someone else, some older and smarter person to ask. But there was not, there was only himself" (*AA*, p. 189). He does not even know how old he is, "maybe thirteen or maybe fourteen or maybe fifteen but would never know it for certain forever more" (*AA*, p. 189). Sutpen told Quentin's grandfather that his innocence was "instructing him" and it was "like an explosion" when it said that "to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what he did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (*AA*, p. 192). Then Sutpen left that night and "he never saw any of his family again" (*AA*, p. 192).

That is when he went to the West Indies, a place he had learned where "poor men went in ships and became rich, it didn't matter how, so long as that man was clever and

courageous: the latter of which I believed that I possessed, the former of which I believed that, if it were to be learned by energy and will in the school of endeavor and experience, I should learn" (*AA*, p. 195). Quentin is narrating what Sutpen supposedly had told his grandfather while they were out in the woods chasing the French architect.

At this point, Quentin describes even Sutpen's attitude, when he is telling his story to grandfather, "and nothing of vanity, nothing comic in it either Grandfather said, because of that innocence which he had never lost because after it finally told him what to do that night he forgot about it and didn't know that he still had it" (*AA*, p. 194). Sutpen "told Grandfather – told him, mind; not excusing, asking for no pity; not explaining, asking for no exculpation: just told Grandfather how he had put his first wife aside" (*AA*, p. 194).

Quentin quotes his grandfather quoting Sutpen, "I found that she was not and could never be, through no fault of her own, adjunctive or incremental to the design which I had in mind, so I provided for her and put her aside" (*AA*, p. 194). Here Sutpen's design starts taking shape for the reader/listener/narratee. And Sutpen is not described as an innocent young boy anymore. He is portrayed as an insensitive man, who is able to tell parts of his story to Quentin's grandfather with no emotion.

At least, for Quentin's grandfather, it appears as if Sutpen "was not talking about himself. He was telling a story. He was not bragging about something he had done; he was just telling a story about something a man named Thomas Sutpen had experienced, which would still have been the same story if the man had had no name at all, if it had been told about any man or no man over whiskey at night" (*AA*, p. 199). Sutpen tells his own story detached from it.

> – Yes, sitting there in Grandfather's office trying to explain with that patient amazed recapitulation, not to Grandfather and not to himself because Grandfather said that his very calmness was indication that he had long since given up any hope of ever understanding it, but trying to explain to circumstance, to fate itself, the logical steps by which he had arrived at a result absolutely and forever incredible, repeating the clear and simple synopsis of his history (which he and Grandfather both now knew) as if he were trying to explain it to an intractable and unpredictable child: 'You see, I had a design in my mind. (*AA*, p. 212)

What Sutpen calls repeatedly his "design" is explained in detail through the retelling of Quentin to Shreve, from what his grandfather had told him, "Whether it was a good or a bad design is beside the point; the question is, Where did I make the mistake in it, what did I do or misdo in it, whom or what injure by it to the extent which this would indicate. I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family – incidentally of course, a wife" (*AA*, p. 212). So that is why Sutpen goes off to Haiti to make

his fortune on a sugar plantation, and there he takes a wife who he believes to be part French and part Spanish. However, after she has borne his son, she is revealed to be part Negro, a fact that, as Sutpen puts it, makes an "ironic delusion" (id., p. 211) of his entire plan. His design depends upon genealogical clarity and purity, on the ability to chart a clear authoritative relationship between origin and endpoint. Thus, Sutpen repudiates his wife and starts over again at Sutpen's Hundred, in a new originating creation. But then, Charles Bon, his son by the first wife, appears from the past to threaten "a mockery and a betrayal" (*AA*, p. 220) of his design. Charles Bon is a threat to Sutpen because he is asking that the new pure Sutpen line, Judith, be intermixed with the dark blood of the past. So it is now Sutpen who must turn his first-born son, Charles Bon, from the front door of his own plantation house.

Even after all disasters, Sutpen keeps on trying to forge a dynasty, his grand design. After the war, and Henry's disappearance, Sutpen proposes to Rosa that they breed together, and then marry if she produces a son. In outrage, she flees back to Jefferson. After this, he makes a last attempt with Milly Jones, who is poor and white, but, above all, white. And it results in a daughter, and Sutpen's death at the hand of Wash Jones.

Sutpen's repeated attempts to found a genealogy do not work, because the authority and outcome of a genealogy cannot be postulated from its origin. The authority of genealogy is known in its outcome. Sutpen is constantly attempting to write the history of the House of Sutpen prospectively, whereas history is evidently always retrospective. And here it is possible to find a source of Quentin's relative success as narrator of the past. But it is also the source of his anguish at being condemned to narrate the past, as the following excerpt shows,

> Then hearing would reconcile and he would seem to listen to two separate Quentins now – the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was – the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage, like this: *It seems that this demon – his name was Sutpen – (Colonel Sutpen) – Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation – (Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) – tore violently.* (*AA*, p. 4-5)

This passage is from the first chapter, where Rosa tells Quentin her version for the most part. But it is already possible to see Quentin struggling to understand the story by elaborating one that he tells himself, with the memories he already has and the added pieces

Rosa provides. For instance, he changes *built a plantation* to *tore violently*, using what he hears from Rosa. By the way, Rosa carefully chooses Quentin as her narratee. As she tells him, “So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe someday you will remember this and write about it” (*AA*, p. 5). Not only does he remember it, but also it is part of him:

> Quentin already knew. It was a part of his twenty years’ heritage of breathing the same air and hearing his father talk about the man; a part of the town’s – Jefferson’s – eighty years’ heritage of the same air which the man himself had breathed between this September afternoon in 1909 and that Sunday morning in June in 1833 when he first rode into town out of no discernible past and acquired his land no one knew how and built his house, his mansion, apparently out of nothing and married Ellen Coldfield and begot his two children – the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride – and so accomplished his allotted course to its violent (Miss Coldfield at least would have said, just) end. Quentin had grown up with that; the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad. His childhood was full of them; his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts […]. (AA, p. 7)

This heritage, which is part of him, is also part of the town; it is part of his memory as well as the collective memory. The past for Quentin, as seen in this excerpt, is the world of ghosts which has fallen to his inheritance and which one can attempt to placate only through acts of genealogical narration. On the one hand, it seems that *Absalom, Absalom!* sums up the nineteenth-century tradition of the novel, especially in its concern with genealogy, authority and patterns of transmission[50]. On the other hand, it subverts it in a manner that reaffirms a traditional set of problems for the novel while disallowing its traditional solutions.

By the time Quentin and Shreve give shape to Sutpen’s story, they turn to Sutpen’s sons, Bon and Henry. Bon has a design as well. In its parodic form, which could be a parody of the plots in the novel, it is represented by the figure of the lawyer of Bon’s mother, maintaining his secret notations as follows,

> *Today he finished robbing a drunken Indian of a hundred miles of virgin land, val. 25,000. At 2:31 today came up out of swamp with final plank for*

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[50] For instance, a chronology is provided at the end of the novel, followed by a genealogy and a map. These are traditional schemata for the ordering of time and experience from which the novel departs, yet by which it is also haunted, as by the force of an absence. In this respect, Peter Brooks affirms that *Absalom, Absalom!* “may indeed be very much the story of the haunting force of absences, including formal absences, in the wake of whose passage the novel constructs itself” (1992, p. 287). But when Faulkner considered this important and decided to include a chronology, a genealogy, and a map at the end of the novel, he also grounded the novel in his imaginary Yoknapatawpha – his own little postage stamp of soil. And it is worthy of mention that the map Faulkner designed – and it is printed in his own handwriting – includes not only the places, but also short notes with a few of the relevant events in that community. So, it is not just a map, it also tells some stories about the other books Faulkner had written.

> *house, val. in conj. with land 40,000. 7:52 p.m. today married. Bigamy threat val. Minus nil. Unless quick buyer. Not probable. Doubtless conjoined with wife same day. Say 1 year* and then with maybe the date and hour too: *Son. Intrinsic val. possible though not probable forced sale of house & land plus val. crop minus child's one quarter. Emotional val. plus 100% times nil. plus val. crop. Say 10 years, one or more children. Intrinsic val. forced sale house & improved land plus liquid assets minus children's share. Emotional val. 100% times increase yearly for each child plus intrinsic val. plus liquid assets plus working acquired credit* and maybe here with the date too: *Daughter* and you could maybe even have seen the question mark after it and the other words even: *daughter? daughter? daughter?* trailing off […] (*AA*, p. 241)

The lawyer is scheming to blackmail Sutpen, and his calculations present blatantly the plot of the nineteenth-century social and familial novel, with its equations of consanguinity, property, ambition, and eros, that is the background for the plotting of *Absalom, Absalom!* Still, Bon has a simpler and more absolute design. He merely wants any sign of recognition from his father. "*He would just have to write 'I am your father. Burn this' and I would do it*" (*AA*, p. 261). In order to force the admission of paternity, Bon's insistence on marriage to Judith becomes the choice of scandal. What appears to be erotic desire reveals itself to be founded on the absolute demand for recognition by the father.

Bon's design and its working-out leads to the key scene, in 1865, as the Confederate army falls back toward Richmond and final defeat, when Colonel Sutpen summons Henry to his tent and says, " Henry, […] my son" (*AA*, p. 282); essential words that Bon will never hear. Sutpen then delivers the final answer to the enigma by saying, "*He must not marry her, Henry. His mother's father told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part negro*" (*AA*, p. 283).

Then Bon draws the conclusion that the miscegenation is the threat to Sutpen, "*So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear*" (*AA*, p. 285). It is only at this belated point in the novel that knowledge catches up with event, and Henry learns what those narrators who originally were narratees have learned.

This scene articulates the revelations that are necessary to construct a coherent plot, and it is narrated by Quentin and Shreve. But on what basis do they narrate it? By what authority do the narrators continue? In the earlier parts of their narrative there are glimpses at sources and documents, whereas here there are none. Some pages earlier, Shreve says to Quentin, "you wait. Let me play a while now" (*AA*, p. 224). And before that, "All right. Dont bother to say he stopped now; just go on" (*AA*, p. 208). These are just two excerpts of a

number of other examples from the novel that indicate clearly that they have passed beyond any narrative reporting to narrative invention.

Thus, what I would like to bring to evidence is that their narrating turns to inventing what they could not construct from the evidence they had. At this point, if you ask who is speaking here, the text replies everyone and no one, since

> 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 became audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least, to Shreve) shades too) quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporising breath (*AA*, p. 243).

This demonstrates that the narratees/listeners have taken over responsibility for the narrative, favoring a direct re-creation. There is no reportage or its syntactic subordinations such as "He said that she said that…" It appears as if the reported speech is an act of ventriloquism, in a duet for four voices in which they are "compounded each of both yet either neither" (*AA*, p. 280), since Quentin and Shreve become compounded with Henry and Bon. In *Absalom, Absalom!* narrators, narratees, and characters become compounded and interchangeable, and the narrated and the narrating occupy shifting positions, so the distance between telling and listening has collapsed[51].

There is a revelatory moment in both the story and its plot that is held in suspense almost the length of the novel. The scene I refer to marks the moment at which the time of the narrators intersects with the time of the narrated, and it reveals that one of the main characters of the past drama lives on into the present of narration:

> *And you are –?*
>
> *Henry Sutpen.*
>
> *And you have been here –?*
>
> *Four years.*
>
> *And you came home –?*

---

[51] Could this mean that as Quentin and Shreve take over the text, so the readers might do the same, both reading and rewriting it to their own design? Are the implied occurrences or events of the story (in the sense of *fabula*) merely a by-product of the needs of plot, indeed of plotting, of the rhetoric of the *sjuzet*? Is the narrative event a necessary illusion that enables the interpretative narrative discourse to go further? Affirmative answers to these previous questions could imply that "[…] the ultimate subject of any narrative is its narrating, that narrative inevitability reveals itself to be a Moebius strip where the unwittingly end up on the plane from which we began. Origin and endpoint – and, perforce, genealogy and history – are merely as-if postulations ultimately subject to the arbitrary whims of the agency of narration, and of its models of readership. Narrative plots may be no more – but of course also no less – than a variety of syntax which allows the verbal game – the dialogue, really – to go on." (BROOKS, 1992, p. 305)

> *To die. Yes.*
>
> *To die?*
>
> *Yes. To die.*
>
> *And you have been here –?*
>
> *Four years.*
>
> *And you are –?*
>
> *Henry Sutpen.* (*AA*, p. 298)

What happens in this passage, when Quentin meets with Henry Sutpen at Sutpen's Hundred in the fall of 1909, just before his departure for Harvard? Actually, it seems to be some sort of black hole, a hollow structure at the center of the narrative. It reads as almost a palindrome, being virtually identical backward and forward. I believe it offers yet another insight into Quentin's relationship to the narrative.

For instance, Quentin's narrating appears to impel him toward recollection. This postponed replay of the meeting with Henry Sutpen, while offering the promise that the past can be recuperated within the present, is disappointing in that it offers no revelation. However, it evidences compulsive narrative desire since the result of this scene for Quentin is "Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore. Nevermore. Nevermore" (*AA*, p. 298-9). An anxiety never to be mastered, a past come alive that never can be laid to rest. This is one of the reasons I read this novel as an example of remotivation of narrative through narration and the need for it.

There is a character in *Absalom, Absalom!* who makes a claim for narrating as, in Genette's terms, the narrative act productive of plot and story. Judith is the one who evokes the loom, while she asks Quentin's grandmother to keep the letter she received from Charles Bon during the war, a letter "without date or salutation or signature":

> […] 'Me? You want me to keep it?'
>
> 'Yes,' Judith said. 'Or destroy it. As you like. Read it if you like or dont read it if you like. Because you make so little impression, you see. You get born and you try this and you dont know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they dont know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it cant matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it provided there was someone

> to remember to have the marble scratched and set up or had time to, and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they dont even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell, and it doesn't matter. And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something – a scrap of paper – something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that *was* once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone cant be *is* because it never can become *was* because it cant ever die or perish……' (*AA*, p. 100-1)

Judith's evocation extends itself, moving from the letter to the entanglement of marionettes, which then modulates to the loom and the weaving of the rug, then moves on to another kind of text, the legend scratched on the tombstone, then back to the letter and the act of transmission of the letter.

Even Judith's struggle with the tenses of the verb "to be," "was," "is," indicates the problem of narrative as recovery of the past. The transmission becomes important, as in the passing-on of Bon's letter of 1865. It links the reader to the reading and also the writing of "historical" documents. Following Judith herself, Quentin's grandmother, grandfather, father, and then Quentin himself, as a belated reader of the document, s/he is summoned to take place in the experience of transmission, "to join the ventriloquized medium of history as fiction and fiction as history, perhaps finally to become, in a modification of Proust's phrase, the writer of himself" (BROOKS, 1992, p. 311).

What is the motive of all this incessant narrating? *Absalom, Absalom!* offers no certain answer to the question of motivation, and, as I have already mentioned here, it rather suggests a remotivation of narrative through narration. But some issues are highlighted in the way they are presented throughout the novel, such as the question of fathers and sons, related issues of fraternity, and communicability of experience.

Absalom, Absalom!, with its biblical intertext in the title[52], signals from the beginning the issue of fathers and sons. Circling about the problem of what Shreve calls "that one ambiguous eluded dark fatherhood" (*AA*, p. 240), the related issues of fraternity are raised with regard to Henry and Bon, Quentin and Shreve. In addition to that, the question of

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[52] Faulkner explains during an interview, "As soon as I thought of the Idea of the man who wanted sons and the sons destroyed him, then I thought of the title" (FAULKNER, 1959, p. 76). Like King David in the Biblical story from which Faulkner derived the title of his novel, Thomas Sutpen rises through his own power to high station among men, breaks the moral law and brings suffering upon his children. In both the house of David and the house of Sutpen, retribution takes the form of violent crimes by the children - revolt, incest, fratricide. The parallels in the stories are not extensive, but sufficient to indicate continuity in the human condition through centuries of time.

paternity, including genealogy, and filiality are indicators of problematic issues of narrative meaning itself. Meaning as a coherent patterning of relation and transmission[53], as the possibility of selection and combination that is governed by rules, as the sense-creating design of writing.

Incest and miscegenation appear to be the threads of patterning, two elements of design, woven throughout the novel. According to Shreve, incest may be the perfect androgynous coupling, from which one would not have to uncouple, "maybe if there were sin too maybe you would not be permitted to escape, uncouple, return. – Aint that right?" Immediately after this question, the narrator emphasizes the fact that Quentin has plenty of opportunity to contradict Shreve, but he does not, as the continuation of the text shows: "He ceased; he could have been interrupted easily now. Quentin could have spoken now, but Quentin did not." (*AA*, p. 259)

Incest creates too much sameness, denies difference, overassimilates. Lévi-Strauss, in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, has claimed that it is the incest taboo that creates the differentiated society, therefore, the attraction to incest poses a threat, which can lead to the collapse of difference, loss of tension, the stasis of desire extinguished in absolute satisfaction. On the other hand, there is mixture of blood, miscegenation. It is "the very trace of difference: that which overdifferentiates, creates too much difference, sets up a perpetual slippage of meaning where […] one cannot find any points of fixity in the signifying chain." (BROOKS, 1992, p. 308) This slippage of meaning happens in the case of Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, who looks white but chooses blackness.

In this passage that gets told by Mr. Compson to Quentin, Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon is taken into court after a fight:

> […] your grandfather saw him, the boy (only a man now) handcuffed to an officer, his other arm in a sling and his head bandaged since they had taken him to the doctor first, your grandfather gradually learning what had happened or as much of it as he could since the Court itself couldn't get very much out of the witnesses, […] trouble which he and not the negroes started according to the witnesses and for no reason, no accusation of cheating, nothing; and he making no denial, saying nothing, refusing to speak at all, sitting there sullen pale and silent: so that at this point all truth, evidence vanished into a moiling clump of negro backs and heads and black arms and hands clutching sticks of stove wood and cooking implements and razors, the white man the focal point of it and using a knife which he had produced from somewhere […] (*AA*, p. 163-4).

[53] Is coherent understanding, the explanatory narrative plotted from origin to endpoint, possible and transmissible? Do the sons inherit from the fathers, do they stand in structured and significant relation to an inheritance which informs the present? Can the past speak in a syntactically correct and comprehensible sentence?

This Bon has the appearance of a white man, therefore he is treated in a different way. For instance, he is taken to a doctor before going to court. He prefers silence, he does not defend himself, and Quentin's grandfather wonders:

> […] no cause, no reason for it […]; only your grandfather to fumble, grope, grasp the presence of that furious protest, […] with a furious and indomitable desperation which the demon himself might have shown, as if the child and then the youth had acquired it from the walls in which the demon had lived, the air which he had once walked in and breathed until that moment when his own fate which he had dared in his turn struck back at him; only your grandfather to sense that because the justice and the others present did not recognise him, did not recognise this slight man with his bandaged head and arm, his sullen impassive (and now bloodless) olive face, who refused to answer any questions, make any statement: so that the justice (Jim Hamblett it was) was already making his speech of indictment when your grandfather entered, utilising opportunity and audience to orate, his eyes already glazed with that cessation of vision of people who like to hear themselves talk in public: 'At this time, while our country is struggling to rise from beneath the iron heel of a tyrant oppressor, when the very future of the South of a place bearable for our women and children to live in depends on the labor of our own hands, when the tools which we have to use, to depend on, are the pride and integrity and forbearance of black men and the pride and integrity and forbearance of white; that you, I say, a white man, a white, –' and your grandfather trying to reach him, stop him, trying to push through the crowd, saying, 'Jim. Jim. *Jim!*' and it already too late, as if Hamblett's own voice had waked him at last or as if someone had snapped his fingers under his nose and waked him, he looking at the prisoner now but saying 'white' again even while his voice died away as if the order to stop the voice had been shocked into short circuit, and every face in the room turned toward the prisoner as Hamblett cried, *'What are you? Who and where did you come from?'* […] (*AA*, p. 164-5)

This Bon, who is Charles Bon's child by the octoroon woman, takes a black wife, and their child will be the idiot Jim Bond. In fact, he has black ancestry in both his mother and his father, but at this point in the novel, this has not been revealed yet. So, Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon presents a problem in categorization when he is hauled into court and admonished by the justice for "going with blacks." Jim Hamblett, following the vocative "you, a white man," turns back on his words to find the sign he has used subverted in its referent: "he looking at the prisoner now but saying 'white' again even while his voice died away as if the order to stop the voice had been shocked into short circuit, and every face in the room turned toward the prisoner as Hamblett cried, *'What are you? Who and where did you come from?'* […]." In this slippage of signified from under its signifier, a transgression of categories and accepted patternings is encountered.

The younger generation telling the House of Sutpen story appears to be caught between two figures[54], incest and miscegenation, never able to interweave them in a coherent design. The following passage illustrates this situation of paradox and impossibility. Narrated by Quentin and Shreve, this exchange between between Henry and Bon takes place in Colonel Sutpen's camp in 1865:

> "– *You are my brother.*
>
> – *No I'm not. I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry.*" (*AA*, p. 286)

Just like this nigger/brother riddle that ends up being solved by a pistol shot, incest and miscigenation, sameness and difference, give a situation of paradox and impossibility. The working-out of Sutpen's design is a failure, and these two figures also fail to achieve a pattern of significant interweaving. Noticing that it takes two Negroes to get rid of one Sutpen, Shreve sums up this problem in design as it concerns the Sutpen "ledger" at the end of the novel:

> […] Which is all right, it's fine; it clears the whole ledger, you can tear al the pages out and burn them, except for one thing. And do you know what that is?" Perhaps he hoped for an answer this time, or perhaps he merely paused for emphasis, since he got no answer. "You've got one nigger left. One nigger Sutpen left. Of course you cant catch him and you dont even always see him and you never will be able to use him. But you've got him there still. You still hear him at night sometimes. Dont you? (*AA*, p. 302)

The one "nigger Sutpen left" is Jim Bond, who can be heard howling at night[55]. The residual meaning[56] embodied in Jim Bond seems the very principle of nonsignificance. But there is one connection between Jim Bond and the story of Sutpen's learning both French and Creole in Haiti. These sounds of incomprehensible languages frame the story of Sutpen's design and its collapse.

At the beginning of the process, in 1833, Sutpen is featured on horseback with his twenty "wild" slaves, with whom he spoke in a language unknown to its Mississippi auditors, who imagined it sui generis. At the end of the novel's narrative, in 1910, the last that remains of Sutpen's family and its hopes is Jim Bond, the idiot whose howling can be heard at night. Insofar as human beings live with each other and not in individual solitude, language is what makes this possible. The one who realizes this importance of language is Quentin, in

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[54] Incest would belong to the pole of metaphor, but as static, inactive metaphor, the same-as-same; whereas miscegenation would be a "wild," uncontrollable metonymy.

[55] "The tale he would tell would be full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

[56] He seems to stand as a parodic version of Barthes's contention that the classical narrative offers at its end the implication of a residue of unexhausted meaning, a "pensivity" that remains to work in the reader.

parenthesis, refering to his grandfather. In the following passage he reflects and develops a perspective about language, while telling the story of Sutpen learning French and Creole in Haiti.

> And he overseeing it, riding peacefully about on his horse while he learned the language (that meager and fragile thread, Grandfather said, by which the little surface corners and edges of men's secret and solitary lives may be joined for an instant now and then before sinking back into the darkness where the spirit cried for the first time and was not heard and will cry for the last time and will not be heard then either) (*AA*, p. 202)

It is clear from this excerpt that joining is a response against darkness. These reflections follow a thirty-one-line sentence that conjures the island of Haiti, "where high mortality was concomitant with the money and the sheen on the dollars was not from gold but from blood." (*AA*, p. 201-2) This way, Haiti is represented both as dark and isolated yet also as itself a scene of multiple conjunctions[57].

In the novel, the Creole comes from the past, and at least a few of those present know it; the howling comes from the future, and no one yet knows what it says. Peter Brooks sees the recovery of the past as being "the aim of all narrative." If this is true, the way *Absalom, Absalom!* works out the process of telling the past is revealing. Because it does not recover the past by integrating it within the present through a coherent plot fully predicated and understood as past. Instead, the attempted recovery of the past reveals the continuing history of past desire as it persists in the present, and it shapes the way of telling.

> The compulsion to narrate the past in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and to transmit its words, may speak both of an unmasterable past and of a dynamic narrative present dedicated to an interminable analysis of the past. Faulkner's present is a kind of tortured utopia of unending narrative dialogue informed by desire for a "revelatory knowledge." That knowledge never will come, yet that desire never will cease to activate the telling voices." (BROOKS, 1992, p. 312)

This past being narrated is never-ending. Apparently, narrating is a nostalgic enterprise, oriented toward the recovery of the past, "yet really phatic in its vector, asking for hearing" (BROOKS, 1992, p. 312). Has Shreve heard Quentin? His last question in the novel is, "Now I want you to tell me just one thing more. Why do you hate the South?" (FAULKNER, 1990, p. 303). Is this a sign of failure of comprehension of all that has been told, or on the contrary too full an understanding of the desire animating the narrative act? This is a question that I leave unanswered. Differently, Quentin did not silence after Shreve's last question. He answered it "quickly, at once, immediately,"

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[57] Imperialist clichés of racial cultural difference are carefully placed within the realm of fable, of the things people say. According to Jonathan Arac (2007), *Absalom, Absalom!* is framed by alterity.

> "I dont hate it," Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; "I dont hate it," he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!* (FAULKNER, 1990, p. 303)

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Now returning to the beginning of *Absalom, Absalom!*, I quote Rosa Coldfield, who talks about the "*the raging and incredulous recounting (which enables man to bear with living)*" (FAULKNER, 1990, p. 130). There is plenty of recounting in this novel, and, as has been studied here, each recounting holds a different assessment of the facts. Each and every one of these storytellers color their narratives according to their position and understanding of the story of Sutpen.

For instance, the novel starts with Rosa Coldfield's angle, which is full of resentment. Then, Mr. Compson's narrative appears to be more logical and clear. But what I consider important is that all these stories are told to Quentin, who desperately attempts to understand them through the narration. From narratee, Quentin turns into narrator, as he retells the story of Sutpen to Shreve, struggling with it until the very end of the novel.

Thus, if I take into consideration that the reader also struggles to get the whole picture of the story being told, whether it is because of the way the narrative is constructed or due to the fragments of memories the narrators reconstruct as they tell Sutpen's story, I can say that the reader also participates in this chain of re-creation set off by Faulkner's novel.

This aspect of re-creation of the work by Faulkner, either novel or short story, *Absalom, Absalom!* or *A Rose for Emily*, is one of the connections with Walter Benjamin's discussion in *The Storyteller*. Benjamin sees a decline in the transmissibility of experience, which leads to a loss of the possibility of a tradition shared by a community, reconstructed in each generation in the continuity of the stories told. In *Absalom, Absalom!* and *A Rose for Emily*, the community is sharing stories, reconstructing and re-creating them along the way through different points of view. This confirms the transmissibility of experience, giving hope to the continuity of stories retold.

At this point in the study, though, I read Faulkner's novel as one example of Benjamin's concern with the fact that it is impossible for memory and language to come to terms with a traumatic experience. For instance, the portrayal of Quentin's reaction at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* ilustrates that impossibility. However, throughout the novel, the storytelling effort demonstrates that there could be a way of coming to terms with one's experience in order "*to bear with living*" (FAULKNER, 1990, p. 130), as Rosa Coldfield says. So, instead of agreeing with Benjamin's statement that "the art of storytelling is coming to an end" (p. 83), it is clear for me that in Faulkner there is plenty of telling and retelling of stories.

In *A Rose for Emily*, it is the community's collective memory that activates the narrative. There is no way of identifying each narrator, but reading into each point of view contributes to the understanding of the story. And what I read are not just clues as to Emily Grierson's story, but the way her story is told shows me how that community functions and changes over generations. Thus, this short story is not the product of an individual, or at least it does not read like that. It is rather a gathering of experiences and memories, creating a new experience for those listening to/reading it.

The two works by Faulkner analysed here do not present themselves detached from experience. Instead, they promote this interchange of experience. The telling of the story by Quentin to Shreve, and later by Shreve to Quentin, exemplified briefly in the previously mentioned excerpts, makes the frame that encloses all the others. So, there is not one, but several narrative frames in the story of Sutpen, from his early youth through the death of his remaining son and half-Negro daughter.

Moreover, this telling and retelling is based on versions of parts of the same story, given to Quentin by Miss Rosa and father; and father's version is based in large part on a version given him by his father, who got it in part from Sutpen himself. This series of frames, one within the other, like the picture of a picture containing a picture, is due to Quentin's version containing each of these people speaking in his own voice, often at great length and circumstantially, with unintended revelation of himself in the process.

The outer frame takes place in Quentin's college room at Harvard in January 1910. At first Quentin is alone, reliving in memory the afternoon in Miss Rosa's house some four months ago and the later talk of Sutpen by his father. Then Shreve, his Canadian roommate, comes in and together they go over the story once more, with Shreve doing much of the talking, basing his version on what Quentin has already told him and using his imagination to fill the gaps. When they come to Bon's part of the story they are in perfect agreement, though

about Bon and his motives and character they know less than about anyone else. Finally they go to bed and Quentin relives in memory once more the evening with Miss Rosa at the Sutpen house of which he has already told Shreve.

This Quentin-Shreve frame is the largest and, at first, Shreve seems to have emerged in order to provide Quentin with a reason to tell the story he heard before he left Mississippi for college. However, Shreve's presence has other implications. He intervenes in Quentin's telling and offers an additional point of view from which to consider the events focused by the narration. By doing this, he magnifies the story of The Sutpens beyond its initial meaning and enriches it with his imagination.

Quite often Shreve shifts from the individual level of the history of the Sutpens to a broader inquiry about the South: "*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*" (FAULKNER, 1990, p. 142). Shreve has a distance from the story that Quentin does not, because he was not born and did not grow up in the South. And he is not emotionally involved. Sometimes his lack of familiarity with the imagery and frame of mind of the South makes him misunderstand what is going on. For example, only after Quentin says it plainly, does Shreve understand that Sutpen's last attempt to have an heir fails because Milly has a girl instead of a boy.

Even so, Shreve truly enjoys Quentin's tale. He says, "It's better than the theatre, […] better than Ben Hur" (FAULKNER, 1990, p. 176). This way Shreve underlines his enjoyment of what is being told and, at the same time, expresses an irony that will accompany him until his involvement and participation in the story of the Sutpen family become overwhelming.

But let us take a closer look at the first chapter of *Absalom, Absalom!*, where memory intersects the past at a point very close to the present. The novel begins with Quentin becoming actively involved in the story whose general outline he has known for as long as he can remember. Almost at once we move back into the more distant past with Miss Rosa, without however being allowed to forget the present, which is now already past, when Quentin sits in the stifling room and listens. Then this frame, this telling, is replaced by a frame supplied by father's account of Sutpen and his speculations on the meaning of the letter he gives Quentin.

Once more we move back and forth between past and present – the present of the telling, which is already past by the time we are able to identify it. Then the absoluteness of this frame too is destroyed and we see father's telling of the story as only another version, and not without its distortions. As the frames are shifted and the implicit distortions discovered, we see the motive for the continual retelling. Each new version is **a part of the search** in

which Quentin and Shreve involve the reader, the search for a truth beyond and behind distortion.

Thus the past has to be continually reinterpreted; and each reinterpretation becomes a part of the accumulating past; a part even of the past which it attempts to interpret. A knowledge of the end supplies the motive for the search for the beginning: the earliest part of the story – Sutpen's boyhood and young manhood before he came to Jefferson – is retold by Quentin, as his father had told him, in response to Shreve's reaction to Miss Rosa's completed story of the "demon." Perhaps the demon could be understood if we knew what made him as he was. So the **telling** circles the story from a different angle – Sutpen's own account, multiply filtered, of his past and his intentions. The motive for the retellings, the reinterpretations, each of which adds new facts as well as a new perspective and makes necessary a reinterpretation of the facts already known, is constant, and it supplies the organizing principle of the novel.

Consequently, we understand that Quentin is essentially a narrator who takes part in the transmission of stories from his land's past through oral narrative. The South and its oral culture are important here. In order to make transmission possible, the storyteller has to find someone who listens to his story, and that will perpetuate the tradition by becoming a storyteller himself.

In addition, we have to consider Shreve's intervention in the narration, which shows that his imagination is important while shaping Sutpen's story, mainly in the last section of the novel. Shreve widens the story's frame of reference beyond the confines of the South. He usually views the South through his literary culture and he finds a number of interesting analogies for Sutpen, the character who seems to inspire him most.

Quentin and Shreve are telling and creating the story with two different attitudes. On the one hand, Quentin tells what had already been told to him by his father, or by Miss Rosa, highlighting the importance of the oral tradition to which he belongs. On the other hand, Shreve makes new connections and tries to imagine what had been long forgotten because nobody ever told it.

Therefore, they represent memory and imagination, which are necessary skills to remember a story and tell it anew. Another important aspect is that every individual experience is felt as a part of a broader experience, as in the quoted passage that follows.

> *Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks* […]. *Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve*

> *and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.* (FAULKNER, 1990, p. 210)

Experience has been mentioned earlier while reviewing Benjamin's preoccupation with its decreasing communicability in the modern world. But after analyzing *Absalom, Absalom!*, which was taken as a representative example of William Faulkner's work, it is possible to see how important this transmission of experience is.

In fact, it is one of the crucial aspects in Faulkner's narratives. And just like Quentin, there are several other characters in Faulkner's works to whom the telling of stories is essential. To them, knowing involves considerable copying in the form of repetition, not only of countless details and events but even of voices. Knowing begins with remembering, talking and listening.

This "community of listeners", who then become tellers, populate Faulkner's stories. Benjamin affirms that these retellers are responsible for retaining and conserving the strength of a story, as well as its capability of "releasing it after a long time" (BENJAMIN, p. 90). In this context, I find that the art of telling stories is not lost yet. At least in Faulkner, who is the genuine storyteller, for he possesses the talent to turn his characters into storytellers as well. Consequently, his readers are potential storytellers.

As the storyteller viewed by Benjamin is someone who could not help but impregnate the story with his experience, Faulkner did only what was expected of the great storyteller that he is. Faulkner's fictional South is rooted in culture, his characters are engaged in storytelling. Faulkner's experience in his early years of belonging to a community where the telling and retelling of stories was still an important means of cultural transmission and social exchange definitely enriched his work.

This process has also been commented by Olga Vickery, who analyzed Faulkner and his exploration of the problem of language. She states, "Quentin attempts to convey to Shreve the particularly Southern qualities of his experience and language" (p. 267). But this experience is connected to a specific place and time, which makes it difficult for Shreve to get Quentin's point of view about the South. Shreve's understanding is shaped by his own experience, and he is not from the same "community of experience" (VICKERY, 267) that Quentin belongs to, which appears to be the prerequisite for communication. Words are merely empty sounds without such experience – physical, mental, and emotional – to give them content.

> Obviuosly words derive their meaning both from the object or event to which they refer and from the subjective reaction of the speaker or listener to that object or event. A single word conveys different things to different

> people as it reflects not reality but their own particular angle of vision. (VICKERY, 266)

Thus, a word is continually acquiring additional personal, social and historical connotations, in order to make it conform to the speaker's view. Taking the same characters as an example, Quentin and Shreve are giving verbal and aesthetic form to the impact that the story of Sutpen has on them. They are externalizing through language their own emotions and aspirations, making an effort to identify themselves in the shapes they have created.

By externalizing it, they make it a part of the communal memory rather than of their own recollections. This is exactly what Benjamin thought was being reduced in the modern world. I see it somewhat differently from Benjamin, who said that the ability to exchange experiences has ended. On the contrary, Faulkner reveals that it is possible to draw from individual experience and turn it into collective experience, even in a novel. He can do that because he is able to make it the experience of his characters, and consequently, his readers.

Now, the question raised in the beginning was whether it is possible that Faulkner is a genuine storyteller in the terms presented and discussed by Benjamin in his essay *The storyteller: reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov*? After all the considerations presented in this study, I believe that Faulkner is a genuine storyteller, if not *the* genuine storyteller. His work is rooted in the people and he has freedom to access experience.

According to Benjamin, the perfect narrative would constitute a "slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers" (p. 93). Therefore, in this context, *Absalom, Absalom!* could be called perfect narrative, because its story is revealed through the layers of a variety of retelling. And this is identified as a technique

> that has been fundamental to much of the Yoknapatawpha series: the presentation of an event or individual from a variety of viewpoints resulting in a kaleidoscopic and myriad portrayal (ROBINSON, p. 133).

Therefore this holds true regarding many other novels by Faulkner, evidencing the fact that even when writing novels, he can be considered a great storyteller. For Benjamin this was no longer possible, because he sees the novelist in a different light, as being completely isolated. However, Faulkner[58] remains an original example of a genuine storyteller, who is able to bring experience and experimentation as a single tightly-woven strand.

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[58] During an interview in 1955, Faulkner said, "I did the best I could, and if there's something more I could say, I'd have said it in the book. There's nothing I could add to it. I think if I would do it over, maybe I would do it better, but I always think that with everything I've done, as any artist thinks. The work never matches the dream of perfection the artist had to start with" (BREIT, p. 183). This reinforces the argument that Faulkner is a restless crafstman.

And this originality also makes him a different modernist, a Southern modernist. Cleanth Brooks describes Faulkner in the following passage.

> Although Faulkner's worldview was essentially traditional, and though he usually referred to himself as just a storyteller, his formal and technical strategies are exciting. He experimented boldly and tirelessly, and, far more often than not, successfully. His special quality is variety and plenitude. For instance, he is one of America's great comic writers, but again and again he attains the dignity and intensity of tragedy. He has provided us with many fine and subtle psychological studies, but he also poured out a profusion of characters, vividly portrayed yet often struck off in the brief compass of two or three hundred words. He had fully absorbed the oral tradition from tales told around a hunter's campfire or yarns heard on the front porch of a country store. Yet he also dared to venture hugh-flown rhetoric – flamboyant language, rich cadences, and elaborate imagery. He is an original. There is no one else quite like him in American literature. (1990, p. 342)

As it is possible to see in Brooks's depiction of Faulkner's talent, his storytelling abilities are quite outstanding. He is a modernist writer because of his daring experimentations, but he is a peculiar one. He associates experience with time and place in a unique way. Faulkner is able to rediscover Southernism through modernist art, not despite it.

Moreover, his management of narrative strategies cannot be explained solely through the prism of the European cosmopolitan paradigm of modernism. I believe that the combination of the traditional oral storytelling and the radical experimentation of modernist techniques is what makes the experience of reading his stories so thrilling.

Regarding this experience, Faulkner's readers rightly anticipate that they will have the pleasure of uncovering many aspects of the story for themselves. He pays his readers the tribute of assuming that they can follow his clues and, perhaps, satisfy themselves about the story's meaning.

Another aspect to consider is the fact that Faulkner is a storyteller who has influenced other writers. William Kennedy is one of the many who have acknowledged his indebtedness to Faulkner's distinctive qualities. He writes,

> I was then so new as a writer that I was only intuiting what was heroic in Faulkner: the scope of his literary ambition, very visible, of course; his language, like nothing else in literature; and maybe his combative attitude toward fear. I remember being impressed by that. (KENNEDY, p. 228)

His creation of a fictional place grounded in a real one has inspired people to link him with Faulkner. Kennedy is the author of a group of novels called the Albany Cycle, revolving around a number of families who dwell and participate in the long history of the city of Albany.

I quote Kennedy's words because as a reader, and now as a researcher, I feel the same way toward Faulkner: "I'm sorry I never met him. […] But I'm very glad I've been able to come to Yoknapatawpha County" (p. 230). Even though I was born in Brazil, I often compared my southern experience to that of his fictional south, constructing the idea of a global South.

In a way, Quentin Compson struggles to understand his southern experience, and he explains the role of remembering in his search for comprehension,

> But you were not listening, because you knew it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will and do: so that what your father was saying did not tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant strings of remembering (*Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 172).

On that same note I would like to close this thesis with a reference to another novel - maybe signaling my future studies - with regard to **memory**. These words from the opening of the sixth chapter in *Light in August* made an indelible impression on me: "Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders" (FAULKNER, p. 119). I did not know quite to make of it when I first read this passage. But maybe something hypothetical comes before certain knowledge. Perhaps certain knowledge will or can catch up to what memory "believes," but the belief comes before knowing. Our memories believe things that we cannot even knowingly acknowledge. At least, this is just what I suppose the excerpt means.

Faulkner presents memory as a repository of raw experiences and makes a distinction between memory and knowing as a remembering, which is a translation of these experiences. "The world imprints itself in our memories and we interpret these memories with the structures and frameworks of knowledge" (NEWMAN, p. ix). That is how we are able to "derive meaning from our memories, remembering through our articulation of them and articulating in order to remember" (NEWMAN, p. ix). By composing stories we structure our experiences, shaping them according to the demands placed on us by culture and by ourselves.

More than just a process of retrieving information from memory, making a selection from it and expressing it in narrative form, storytelling is a performance that requires contextually appropriate reconstruction, rather than straightforward recall of events. We create and recreate our past in light of our present needs and concerns when we tell personal stories, instead of simply recapitulating stored experience.

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APPENDIX

BANQUET SPEECH[59]

I feel that this award was not made to me as a man, but to my work - a life's work in the agony and sweat of the human spirit, not for glory and least of all for profit, but to create out of the materials of the human spirit something which did not exist before. So this award is only mine in trust. It will not be difficult to find a dedication for the money part of it commensurate with the purpose and significance of its origin. But I would like to do the same with the acclaim too, by using this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to by the young men and women already dedicated to the same anguish and travail, among whom is already that one who will some day stand here where I am standing.

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up? Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.

He must learn them again. He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed - love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice. Until he does so, he labors under a curse. He writes not of love but of lust, of defeats in which nobody loses anything of value, of victories without hope and, worst of all, without

[59] William Faulkner’s speech at the Nobel Banquet at the City Hall in Stockholm, December 10, 1950 upon receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature 1949.

pity or compassion. His griefs grieve on no universal bones, leaving no scars. He writes not of the heart but of the glands.

Until he relearns these things, he will write as though he stood among and watched the end of man. I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure: that when the last dingdong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.