

“NOT GONE OR VANISHED EITHER.” WILLIAM FAULKNER’S USE OF  
MEMEORY AND IMAGINATION

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role that memory and imagination play in three of William Faulkner's novels: *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Unvanquished*. While most scholars perceive Faulkner's characters as burdened, debilitated, and destroyed by the past, I argue that Faulkner presents a wide spectrum of engagement with the past which includes the potential for memory to serve as a tool of redemption and power. Henri Bergson's notion of the fluidity of all time past, present, and future forms the center of Faulkner's understanding of time, and in this paradigm, Faulkner's characters are capable of creating and re-creating their pasts through memory and projecting their futures through imagination. In emphasizing Dilsey's role as a rememberer in *The Sound and the Fury*, Shreve's role as an imaginer in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and Bayard Sartoris's role as defeater of his cultural and familial past in *The Unvanquished*, I demonstrate that while Faulkner does present memory and imagination as harmful forces, he also illustrates their potential for preservation and redemption.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wife, Kathleen Gleason, who supported and encouraged me through every step of the process.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The past could be said to be the central theme of William Faulkner's works. Faulkner littered the pages of his novels with characters engaging the past, and he famously said, "There is no such thing really as was because the past is" (Rollyson 2). Faulkner's characters who engage this past that isn't past are haunted by it, attempt to deny it, or manipulate it for personal gain. Faulkner's novels suggest that the most defining trait of any person is how he or she relates to the past. The fundamental link between individuals and the past is memory, and Faulkner presents characters who engage in remembering in a wide variety of ways. The destruction or survival of nearly all of Faulkner's characters can be traced to how they remember the past. Although many scholars have written about Faulkner's use of the past and his views of time, the idea of memory's relationship to the past is most often treated as static and uniform for Faulkner's characters. In fact, Faulkner presents memory in a different way for nearly every one of his major characters. In examining the wide variety of ways Faulkner's characters remember in *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Unvanquished*, I will trace not only the psychologically damaging capacity of the past, which critics most often emphasize in Faulkner, but I will also examine the possibility of redemption for the individual and for society through memory.

Scholars who examine Faulkner's use of memory often limit themselves by viewing Faulkner's presentation of memory as essentially negative and operating in a one dimensional way for most characters of his characters. Early scholarly reactions to Faulkner's fiction include Philip Rahv's negative interpretation of Faulkner's presentation of Southerners' relationship to the past and memory. Rahv sees Faulkner as presenting an archetypal rememberer whose memory of the past causes him to be "hemmed in by his own consciousness" and "finding a forced release only in violence and melodrama" (20-1). Rahv's understanding of Faulkner's use of memory as strictly negative has endured to the twenty-first century with scholars including Leigh Anne Duck, who sees Faulkner's presentation of memory as fundamentally debilitating. In "Haunting Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner and Traumatic Memory," Duck argues that Faulkner presents Southerners who are not only debilitated by their own memories but who also invest in a regional past that is not productive (94). She writes, "individuals who maintain this traumatic relationship to the past do not participate in a community of shared suffering and gained wisdom, but are each isolated" (94). Rahv and Duck typify scholars who interpret Faulkner's presentation of memory as debilitating and isolating.

My analysis challenges and complicates this view by examining the nuance and variety of Faulkner's presentation of memory. Before proceeding, some terms must be defined and a theoretical background must be established. In this study I rely on David Gross's presentation of the terms rememberer and forgetter. In his book *Lost Time: On Remembering and Forgetting in Late Modern Culture*, Gross uses the term rememberer to denote an individual, historical or fictional, whose identity is defined by memory.



Gross argues that the archetypal rememberer is the pre-modern man. He writes, “Before writing came into us as a kind of *aide-memoire*, it was the power of individual memory more than anything else that preserved the knowledge of how to make a fire, build a hut, fashion a weapon, or kill game... Memory equals life” (1). Gross goes on to explain the archetypal forgetter as the modern or post-modern man who must escape his memories. Gross writes that in the twentieth and twenty-first century “we are likely to hear that memory deadens rather than enriches experience,” “memory is burdensome or unhealthy [to many moderns],” and “memory is not and cannot be as accurate as once assumed” (3). Scholars often see Faulkner as arguing through his fiction that forgetters are more adapted to the modern world than rememberers, whereas Faulkner presents a rich variety of characters who engage the world with differing levels of success in graduated range of remembering and forgetting.

The philosophies of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche set up a theoretical background for understanding Faulkner’s presentation of memory. Faulkner directly attributes his understanding of time to the philosophy of Bergson. In an interview with Loic Bouvard, Faulkner said, “There isn’t any time. In fact I pretty much agree with Bergson’s theory of the fluidity of time. There is only the present moment in which I include both the past and the future, and this is eternity” (Brooks 239). Bergson uses the term *durée*, sometimes translated as duration, to describe the experience of engaging the fluidity of time as past, present, and future. In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson writes, “Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present states from its former states”

(100). In other words, the memory is most alive and constructive when it does not try to separate and fixate each past moment but rather engages all time as a single fluid progression. Along with Bergson's theory of time, Faulkner's fiction also contains strong traces, if not explicit use of, Bergson's theory of the different types of memory. For example, in *The Unvanquished* when Bayard Sartoris chooses to avenge his father's death through non-violent action, he imagines the proud and violent family history of the past, the present moment of the town's reaction to his father's death, as well as imagining a projection of the future in which he does not need violence to properly memorialize his father's murder. The imagination holds all three moments of time together in reality for Bayard and is the key to having a memory that does not destroy and debilitate. In the following chapters I explain how Bergson's theories about time and memory allow readers to understand the range of Faulkner's presentation of memory as both destructive and redemptive.

Faulkner never explicitly mentions the influence of Nietzsche on his work; however, Nietzsche's ideas on memory and the past serve as a useful tool for understanding Faulkner's presentation of these themes because like Faulkner he lived in a society with an overwhelming sense of its past. Scholars who use Nietzsche's work to interpret Faulkner most often cite Nietzsche's "The Use and Abuse of History" to demonstrate that Faulkner's fiction presents the dangers of memory and the past. Susan V. Donaldson claims that Faulkner's fiction reads as a morality tale against Nietzschean monumentalism, the highly selective remembering of the past that glorifies and sanitizes the past. Donaldson writes, "For Faulkner himself... the consequences of

monumentalism, however alluring it could be, nevertheless pointed ultimately toward death—to the cemetery holding the graves” (4). Donaldson only sees how Faulkner’s characters *abuse* the history and not how they *use* it, in Nietzschean terms. I plan to demonstrate that Faulkner’s fiction presents memory not just as a potentially dangerous and debilitating entity, but also as something that can preserve and redeem individuals and even whole societies.

Each of the three works I have selected to study present a different aspect of Faulkner’s presentation of memory. Each work features characters that are undone and destroyed by memory, but each work additionally presents characters and moments in which memory is presented as restorative. In *The Sound and the Fury* scholars often note the destructive quality that memory has upon Quentin Compson, who neurotically remembers events from his family’s past and finds himself crushed by the memory of his sensual sister, handicapped brother, and distant parents resulting in his suicide. Using Quentin as a primary example Donaldson writes, “Texts like *The Sound and the Fury*... are marked by that quintessentially modernist desire to escape history, tradition, and the repetitions they require” (7). Donaldson’s statement echoes David Gross’s assessment that for modern man, forgetting is more necessary than remembering. While it is undeniable that Quentin suffers at the hands of memory, scholars who emphasize only Quentin as a rememberer in the novel fail to understand the range of interactions with memory that Faulkner presents in the novel. If Quentin establishes one end of the spectrum, Dilsey establishes the other. She negotiates the memories of the past in a way that affords her the strength to hold together the degenerating Compson family, and her

act of communal remembrance at the Easter Sunday church service demonstrates the redemptive potential for memory that Quentin fails to attain. In the following chapter on *The Sound and the Fury*, I demonstrate the wide arch of rememberers and forgetters that Faulkner presents and his nuanced and varied presentation of memory that extend far beyond the one-dimensional treatment it often receives from scholars.

The second novel in this study, *Absalom, Absalom!*, also presents a range of rememberers and forgetters, but it appears to emphasize the importance of imagination in the process of remembering more than *The Sound and the Fury*. Bergson's influence appears significantly in Faulkner's emphasis on imagination in memory. For Bergson, two forms of memory exist: "the first records, in the form of memory-images, all the events of our daily life as they occur in time; it neglects no detail" (*Memory and Matter* 92). The second type of memory interprets the vast raw data of memory-images allowing the individual to act. In *Memory and Matter* Bergson writes, "In truth, it [the second form of memory] no longer *represents* our past to us, it *acts it*; and if it still deserves the name of memory, it is not because it conserves bygone images, but because it prolongs their useful effect into the present moment" (93). In essence, no exact line can be drawn clearly subdividing the two types of memory from each other or subdividing memory and imagination from each other. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Thomas Sutpen and Shreve demonstrate the importance of memory and imagination to each other. Thomas Sutpen seeks to erase his past as the son of a poor migrant worker by ignoring it and attempting to build a life removed from his past to serve as a fortress against it. Sutpen imagines the future constantly, but attempts to ignore the past, and in doing so he is doomed to be

destroyed by a past he cannot help but repeat. In stark contrast, Shreve's memory and imagination are in proper Bergsonian harmony. While Shreve has not lived the history of the Sutpen legend that Quentin narrates to him, Quentin's active imagination interacts with the memories he creates of the Sutpen narrative, and he ultimately comes closer to understanding the significance of the tale than anyone who witnessed it first hand. Bergson's theory of intuition sheds further light on Quentin's ability to understand others' past better than those who lived it. In the chapter on *Absalom, Absalom!*, I demonstrate that scholars who emphasize memory as purely destructive miss the constructive power that memory has to reveal truth and create meaning out of a chaotic and tormented past.

Of the three novels in this study, *The Unvanquished* presents the most optimistic treatment of memory and has received the least critical treatment in the area. *The Unvanquished* is usually not held in as high esteem as *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, but it has received more critical attention in the last two decades, particularly in its treatment of gender in the character of Drusilla who, although female, rides into Civil War skirmishes with her uncle. Scholars have overlooked the importance memory and imagination play in the novel, and in the ensuing chapter I demonstrate that each character's relation to memory serves to determine his or her ultimate success or downfall. Young Bayard Sartoris, whose coming of age gives the novel its structure, is a dynamic character in his relation to memory and the past. As a child, his relation to the past causes him to violently hunt, kill, and maim the outlaw Grumby in a vendetta. By the novel's close, Bayard's relation to memory changes as he imagines and enacts a

scenario in which violence does not necessitate more violence. *The Unvanquished* also presents the redemptive potential memory has for a defeated society. The community in Yoknapatawpha County selectively remembers the Civil War, but avoids Nietzschean monumentalism while using memory as a survival technique for enduring as a defeated society. The novel demonstrates that memory can defeat defeat by preserving those who remember. The defeated are “not gone or vanished either, so long as there should be defeated or the descendants of defeated to tell it or listen to the telling” (*The Unvanquished* 98). Faulkner demonstrates that memory can preserve and restore life for those who engage in remembering the past as a fluid and living entity rather than a fixed and dead string of data.

## CHAPTER II

### *THE SOUND AND THE FURY: HOPE VS. DESPAIR THROUGH MEMORY AND IMAGINATION*

Faulkner's allusion to *Macbeth* in the title of his best known novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, provides a useful starting point for understanding Faulkner's presentation of memory and imagination in the novel. In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth responds to the news of his wife's death with the following lines:

She should have died hereafter:  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing. (V. iv. 18-29).

Macbeth views time much like Quentin Compson who narrates the second chapter of the novel, obsessively remembers his sister, Caddy, and who ultimately commits suicide while enrolled at Harvard. Both Quentin and Macbeth see the past as the fool's inevitable path to death, the present as a creepingly slow drudgery, and the future as a dull repetition of tomorrows. Macbeth views past, present, and future through a brittle, one-dimensional lens of memory devoid imagination. *The Sound and the Fury* engages the difficulties of remembering the past and facing the future and presents characters whose destruction or salvation depend upon how they employ memory and imagination.

The novel is full of sound (Benjy's howling) and fury (Jason's rage and Quentin's suicide), and the first chapter is told by an idiot (Benjy the manchild), but the novel, like Shakespeare's play read as a whole, is not an affirmation of nihilism signifying nothing. *The Sound and the Fury* certainly does include characters for whom life signifies nothing, but it also includes those for whom life is full of meaning. For whom is life a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing, and for whom is life a tale that has meaning? Faulkner suggests an answer to this question in this novel by presenting characters who exhibit a wide range of relationships to memory and imagination. Faulkner defines his characters through their relation to memory, and he destines them for hope or despair based on how they remember and how they imagine.

Too often critics of *The Sound and the Fury* overlook the balance between hope and despair that the novel presents and interpret the novel solely as a work in which a once illustrious Southern family comes to ruin. The past does invade the present in the novel, but some characters use memory and imagination to redeem the past, whereas



critics often focus solely upon the characters destroyed by memory. Nicole Moulinoux's "The Enchantments of Memory: Faulkner and Proust" is typical of those who miss the hopeful characters in the novel who aren't destroyed by their memories. Moulinoux writes, "Faulkner's heroes, especially those of the great dark novels of his early maturity, from Bayard Sartoris through Quentin Compson and Joe Christmas to Ike McCaslin, are hostages to the past confronting a barred and barren future, and, whether furious rebels or fatalistic victims, they are the docile agents of their doom rather than the responsible actors of their destinies" (35). Moulinoux's list of "heroes" represents a typical bias of critics towards the despairing characters in Faulkner's works. While Quentin is one of Faulkner's important characters and appears in more than one novel, he can hardly be seen as a hero or even as the central character in the polyphonic narrative of *The Sound and the Fury*. Caddy drives more of the conflict in the novel than any other character, Jason is a more compelling case for an anti-hero than Quentin, Benjy is the most sympathetic character in the novel, and Dilsey is the fierce and sacrificing hero if there is one.

According to Moulinoux, "Such triumphs of memory never occur in Faulkner. Whereas Proust's memories are ultimately soothing and restorative, Faulkner's are torturing and destructive" (36). Many of Faulkner's characters *are* tortured and destroyed by memories, but to see only those characters is to entirely miss Faulkner's complex vision of the memory and the past. The characters who remember and imagine in a redemptive way (restoring life, bringing personal peace, and initiating communal unity) are revealed more brightly when contrasted with those who do not. Moulinoux

misses Faulkner's nuanced use of the past in *The Sound and the Fury* because she sees characters with a negative relation to memory: those who hyper-remember, do not remember at all, over imagine, or do not imagine at all. The true hero of the novel is Dilsey, who personally remembers the haunted past of the Compson family but also participates in an act of communal remembering with the members of the church congregation on Easter Sunday. Dilsey's acts of remembering result in a rejuvenation of life for her as well as the ability for her to continue giving care to her family and the Compson family.

Along with Moulinoux, a host of scholars including William R. Thickstun, Edmond L. Volpe, and Andre Bleikasten approach Faulkner's characters with a bias towards studying those for whom memory is negative and destructive; they proceed to color other characters with the same brushstrokes. Moulinoux's assertion that memory for Faulkner is "torturing and destructive" is aptly applied to Quentin Compson, but to apply the same lens to Dilsey and even Benjy results in a one-dimensional view of the novel. Dilsey and to a degree Benjy engage the past through memory and imagination that creates the opposite effect from Quentin's encounter with the past. Each character encounters the past just as powerfully, but not every character encounters it in the tortured and destructive way that Quentin does. In the rest of this chapter, I examine the importance, function, and final result of memory and imagination in the major characters of *The Sound and the Fury*. The characters of the novel represent a wide range of rememberers, forgetters, and imaginers through which Faulkner demonstrates the power for the past to destroy, secure, and/or redeem mankind.

In order to see the progression from despair to hope in the novel, I start by examining Quentin, who provides the negative pole of memory which I read in juxtaposition to the positive presentation of memory that Faulkner demonstrates finally through Dilsey. Quentin is highly neurotic and narcissistic, possibly the most self-centered character in the novel, and his obsession with time and the past are really obsessions with self that paralyze him and ultimately lead him to suicide. The second chapter of the novel belongs entirely to Quentin as Faulkner takes readers directly into the stream of Quentin's consciousness. Quentin's first thoughts focus on his memory of the past and the haunting quality that it has for him; he thinks of the watch and advice that his father gave him. His father's words run through his mind: "I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it" (76). For Quentin, the struggle to forget time and forget the past turn into a struggle between life and death that he ultimately loses. The memory of his sister, Caddy, dominates Quentin's mind and his inability to forget his incestuous relationship with her drives him to his suicide. Quentin's refrain throughout the chapter is "...that never had a sister." He isolates himself from the people around him and the people he thinks about (his roommate Shreve, St. Francis, and even Christ) on the grounds that they never experienced what he experienced with a sister. Living apart from time is presented as an impossibility for Quentin. Faulkner's presentation of Quentin's ceaseless memory echoes Bergson's explanation of the two different kinds of memory. On remembering Bergson writes, "The first, conquered by effort, remains dependent upon our will; the second, entirely spontaneous, is as

capricious in reproducing as it is faithful in preserving” (*Matter and Memory* 102).

Quentin’s attempt to willfully conquer his memory can only extend so far, and his attempt to control the uncontrollable aspect of his memory can only be achieved through suicide.

At times Quentin’s fierce memory of Caddy is beyond his control demonstrating Bergson’s second type of memory, the capricious type. During the most poetic and fragmented section of the chapter, Quentin repeatedly remembers the smell of honeysuckle, a sensory image directly linked to Caddy’s sensuality. He thinks, “damn that honeysuckle I wish it would stop/ you used to like it” (153). Here, Quentin’s memory seems almost involuntary, and Faulkner presents him as an example of the modern figure in literature that David Gross identifies as affirming the act of forgetting. Since Quentin cannot forget or effectively come to terms with Caddy and his past, he is destroyed by them. Nietzsche’s words about the power to remember the past without being destroyed by it from “On the Uses and Abuse of History” describe Quentin perfectly: “There are people who possess so little of this power that they can perish from a single experience, from a single painful event... like a man bleeding to death from a scratch” (62). Quentin’s relationship with Caddy must be viewed as far more than a scratch, but his inability to think of anything else, his constant remembering, create the effect that Nietzsche describes.

Faulkner presents the destructive power of the memory through Quentin’s stream of consciousness journey in chapter two, but it is not memory alone that destroys Quentin. Quentin’s lack of imagination to project a future for himself combines with his

obsessive memory and compulsion to forget the unforgettable that destroys him. Quentin is a constant thinker, but all of his thoughts point backwards to a static and negative past. He cannot imagine or reshape the past into a livable reality for himself, and he never considers the potential of imagining a future either. The events of Quentin's life lead him down his path toward suicide, but his inability to imagine the future create the final catalyst. Faulkner's presentation of a character so trapped by memory and devoid of imagination sets up the extreme negative pole of memory's power in human experience.

Faulkner's treatment of memory's power, however, does not stop with Quentin. As readers move across the spectrum of characters impacted by memory in *The Sound and the Fury*, the mother and son pair of Mrs. Compson and Jason Compson register next and are only a shade less negatively impacted by remembering, forgetting, and imagining than Quentin. While Quentin's failed attempt to forget the past plays itself out in his compulsive recollection and suicide, Jason and Mrs. Compson appear to have successfully forgotten the past only to be daily undone by it. Faulkner again demonstrates the destructive power of an unhealthy memory with two characters for whom life signifies nothing.

Jason narrates chapter three with cynicism and bitterness directed at his family, his employer, and the entire town of Jefferson. He berates and physically abuses his brother Benjy, cons his mother out of money while masquerading as her only faithful child, and he mocks the townsfolk who go to the traveling show. Jason's spite springs from the past that he attempts to forget but that constantly defines him: his father was an

alcoholic, his sister was promiscuous, and his brother Quentin attended Harvard but he had to stay in Jefferson to hold together a family with a decaying social position. Jason's interaction with his sister Caddy, whom he often blames for his present situation, typifies his denial of the past.

Jason's habitual act of forgetting the past is his attempt to find independence and dignity, but it only results in isolation and pettiness. When Caddy comes to Jefferson to bargain with Jason behind their mother's back for visitation rights to Caddy's daughter, ironically also named Quentin, Jason says, "We don't even know your name at that house" (203). Jason and Mrs. Compson have systematically attempted to erase the memory of Caddy from the house by refusing to speak her name. If they don't speak her name, they won't have to remember her and the pain that they place upon her. Through their attempted forgetting, Jason and Mrs. Compson merely isolate themselves instead of healing themselves.

When Jason actively engages memory, it is only within the context of remembering to get more fake checks so he can continue robbing his mother. Since Jason's modus operandi is forgetting, he finds remembering difficult. Jason's motive here is to remember the checks, so he can use them to forget his past by having financial security. He thinks to himself, "you'll have to remember to get some more right away. But who can remember anything in this hurrah" (216). In essence he attempts to remember so he can forget. Jason's tendency to immediately forget the past in order to create a future for himself is illustrated again when he argues with Caddy about her daughter Quentin: "Whether she was in school today is already past. If you've got to

worry about it, worry about next Monday” (260). The past, even the immediate past, becomes irrelevant to Jason who has trained his mind to look only forward, to plot and scheme the future and never confront the past. This habit is the complete opposite of his brother Quentin’s obsession with the past, but the result is the same for both brothers: isolation from family, community, and friends. Faulkner’s emphasis on the importance of a proper relation towards memory of the past and imagination of the future can be identified by interpreting Quentin and Jason as negative or non-examples of that relation.

Jason and his mother, Mrs. Compson, operate in a very similar way with regard to remembering the past. Due to this fact, Mrs. Compson feels a far stronger bond with Jason than she does with any of her other children. The two of them have stayed at home in Jefferson and outlasted or outlived the rest of the family besides Benjy and the black servants. Mrs. Compson considers her bond with Jason to exist beyond the Compson family and sees him as a part of her side of the family only. Jason thinks, “all the Compson gave out before it got to me like Mother says” (197). She blocks out what she considers to be the shameful memory of Caddy by banishing her presence and name from the house as does Jason. Mrs. Compson’s approach to remembering the past diverges from Jason’s approach, however, when it comes to her deceased husband, Jason Compson III. Mrs. Compson makes a concerted effort to remember Mr. Compson in a way that unrealistically beatifies him. In her mind, her husband represents a time when the family had position and dignity. She often uses the phrase “I owe it to his [Mr. Compson’s] memory” when justifying her self-righteous decisions like banning Caddy from the house. Mr. Compson, in fact, was in favor of letting Caddy return home after

Caddy's husband Herbert Head had thrown her out of his house. Allowing Caddy to come home is morally reprehensible to Mrs. Compson, so to her, preserving the memory of Mr. Compson (the symbol of stability and the old order) means preventing her daughter from coming home. Mrs. Compson twists the memory of her husband in an attempt to justify herself and to preserve the idea of her dignity if only in her own mind.

In fact, Mr. Compson was nothing like the bastion of Victorian morality that Mrs. Compson memorializes him into. Jason remembers his father as an alcoholic who never "offer[ed] to sell anything to send me to Harvard" (197). Strangely, Mrs. Compson recognizes her late husband's faults saying to Jason, "I know you are thinking bitterly of your father's memory. You have a right to, I suppose. But it breaks my heart to hear you" (226). Despite this recognition, Mrs. Compson is devoted to her inaccurate memory of Mr. Compson as a matter of survival. To admit who her husband really was and what he truly stood for would destroy her idea of her own identity. Her deluded memory of her husband preserves her deluded idea of herself as a loving and loved mother. In reality, the son whom she considers to be "all I have left" is swindling her. Jason's rejection of memory and Mrs. Compson's partial rejection and partial fantasy of memory doom them both to isolation and delusion.

In the spectrum of characters defined by their relation to the past in *The Sound and the Fury*, Benjy Compson, the manchild whose fragmented and chaotic stream of consciousness forms the first chapter of the novel, is more enabled by memory than the characters discussed above. Although Benjy's memories often send him into a fit of frustrated bellowing since he is unable to express himself through intelligible language, he



is also capable of returning to moments in the past that bring him consolation. Unlike Quentin, Jason, and Mrs. Compson, Benjy's relation to memory brings him closer to those around him instead of isolating him. Benjy's mind is infantile, so his relation to memory is not Faulkner's model for a productive memory, but aspects of Benjy's memory suggest Faulkner's recognition of memory's capacity for restoration and comfort. Benjy's perception of time is also very much like Faulkner's own; Benjy does not perceive the past as past, but he lives in a perpetual moment of past, present, and future that allows him a depth of feeling unattainable to others. Benjy's memory also vividly demonstrates Bergson's presentation of the indistinguishable lines between past, present, and future. For example, in the first chapter Benjy's interactions at age 33 with Luster at the fence of the golf course send his mind back to memories of Caddy and childhood to create a seamless flow of time in Benjy's mind. Benjy's mind operates in a state of pure-duration or *durée*. Bergson writes, "Every feeling, however simple it may be, contains virtually within it the whole past and present of the being experiencing it, and, consequently, can only be separated and constituted into a 'state' by an effort of abstraction or of analysis" (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 25). Benjy certainly does not attempt to analyze or to abstract (as Quentin does) his past and supremely exemplifies Bergson's presentation of a being who experiences time authentically, and this experience allows Benjy a relation to memory that contains a glimmer of hope.

Viewing Benjy as a character who demonstrates a positive relation to memory, or to anything else for that matter, is contrary to many readings of Faulkner. Early Faulkner scholar Edmond L. Volpe writes in his seminal, *A Readers Guide to William Faulkner*:

At thirty-three, he [Benjy] has not learned that fire burns. He places his hand on the hot stove, but makes no association between the pain in his hand and the heat created by the fire. Benjy is also devoid of a time sense, making no differentiation between the past and the present. A remembered event is as real to him as an occurrence in the present. (89)

Volpe casts Benjy's sense of time and memory in a very negative light despite its mirroring of Faulkner's own. Admittedly, failing to remember that fire burns is a negative quality, but Benjy's memory operates through selectivity. It is not as if he is unable to remember anything. After all, if he were unable to remember anything at all it would be impossible for him to experience and sense the past and the present existing in one moment. What Benjy remembers, not what he forgets, is what sets his relation to memory apart from the previous characters in this study. More recently than Volpe, Andre Bleikasten sees Benjy's memory in purely negative terms as well. In *The Most Splendid Failure*, Bleikasten writes, "Benjy is the prisoner of his past, and forever exiled from it, forever 'waiting at the gate'" (77). While Benjy's mind certainly dwells on the past more than on the present or future, his memories do not solely hold him hostage; they provide a degree of safety and comfort for him at times by a suspension of desire that is gratifying to him.

For Benjy, memory functions for survival and security. He requires the past to take refuge from the chaos of the present. In this way, Benjy parallels Gross's pre-modern model of memory in which memory equals life and forgetting equals death. The metaphor of pre-modern man is fitting for Benjy since his mind is infantile; however, just

because his mind is in stasis does not mean that he cannot serve as an example of positive qualities in relation to memory. Benjy's two strongest memories center around his beloved sister Caddy and his dead brother Quentin. In chapter four Faulkner writes, "But he bellowed slowly, abjectly, without tears; the grave hopeless sound of all voiceless misery under the sun. Luster returned, carrying a white satin slipper. It was yellow now, and cracked, and soiled, and when they gave it into Ben's hand he hushed for a while" (316). The slipper is Caddy's, and the solace that it brings comes from Benjy's memory of Caddy as a playmate and a nurturing maternal figure who served as a stand-in for his remote biological mother. Although Benjy's response is infantile, the soothing effect of his memory of Caddy protects him. In a world of chaos, Benjy is likely to act violently as he when he attacked a small child and was castrated in return. Returning to a memory in which the world is not chaos ensures life to Benjy. The memory that the slipper provides calms Benjy and prevents him from doing harm to himself or to others. Faulkner presents Benjy's use of the slipper as a talisman or amulet represents the positive soothing and securing quality memory potentially provides.

The other significant act of memory that Benjy performs is his circuit around the town square and the visitation of his brother's grave. Benjy's mind needs order and routine, so when Luster starts to turn left instead of right to go around the town square on the way to the cemetery, Benjy responds by bellowing dejectedly. It seems unusual that an individual like Benjy so in need of routine would be interested in leaving the routines and order of home. After all, Benjy only recovers from Luster's wrong turn and the beating Jason gives him once they come in sight of home. The final sentence of the novel

demonstrates Benjy's return to calm through the familiarity of his home surroundings: "The broken flower dropped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right, post and tree, window and doorway and signboard each in its ordered place" (321). Benjy's desire to remember his dead brother through a ritual visit to the cemetery has great potential for interrupting his ordered life and comforting surroundings, and his need to remember is stronger than his need for predictability.

Benjy's compulsion to remember Quentin supercedes his need for the security of predictable routine because Jason is a part of Benjy's lost ideal. That ideal exists in flashes of Benjy's memory of life before Caddy's sexual maturation and before Quentin's departure for Harvard. On Benjy's memory of this period Robert Hamblin notes, "With its predominant emphasis upon a long-lost past and its focus on the timeless, innocent (that is, time-less and uncomprehending) mind state of a mentally retarded person, the Benjy section becomes an appropriate analogue to Eden before the fall" (13). If the novel is read through Hamblin's archetypal and mythic lens, Benjy's ritual visitation of Quentin's grave is his attempt to remember and recreate a prelapsarian world where he is a part of the family, at least to Quentin and Caddy, and not simply a chore. Faulkner suggests that even for a severely handicapped individual, memory is the central motivator to man's desire for restoration and security. Sadly, Benjy's memory is not powerful enough on its own to shape his future. Though the power of his memory is limited to moments of solace, Benjy demonstrates that for Faulkner memory does not always destroy.

Dilsey is the character for whom both memory and imagination finally work in conjunction to redeem the past and project a hopeful future. Dilsey is the figure of hope in the novel. She is the Compsons' black servant who takes care of Benjy, cooks meals, and keeps the general peace between Mrs. Compson, Jason, Benjy, and the other black servants. Of all the characters in the novel she has the most cause to despair since her livelihood comes at the mercy of the abusive and racist Compson men and her own children and grandchildren cause as much trouble around the house as anyone. She says to her grandson, Luster, "Lemme tell you something, nigger boy, you got jes as much Compson devilmint in you es any of em" (276). In essence, Dilsey's biological family and the Compson family that she holds together have merged into one entity in which she is the only stabilizing factor. Faulkner writes the fourth and final chapter of the novel in traditional third person point of view with Dilsey's importance to the Compson family at the center of the narration. The Easter Sunday service at her church to which she brings Benjy forms the spiritual climax of the otherwise bleak emotional landscape of the novel. In this moment of spiritual and emotional rapture, readers see Faulkner's model of an individual whose memory has redeemed the past and whose imagination has projected a hopeful future.

Though I find it difficult to read Dilsey as anything other than a picture of hope in a bleak world, many scholars, both dated and recent, dismiss her hopefulness by viewing her as a cardboard stereotype who only shows Faulkner's lack of understanding of the black experience. Early Faulkner scholar Volpe calls her a "primitive" who remains distant from "social man" and "the complexities of society" (126). Her optimism is good

for her but irrelevant for the lives of the Compsons and Sartoris of the world in Volpe's estimation. Similarly Hamblin writes more recently, "Nevertheless, sadly, one must recognize that such virtues seem to have little practical effect upon the world that Dilsey inhabits" (16). Furthermore, William R. Thickstun in *Visionary Closure in the Modern Novel* interprets Dilsey as "admirable but finally inadequate to deal with the complexity of modern life" (161). For these scholars, Dilsey's faith and optimism are isolated and unsustainable.

In fact, however, Faulkner presents Dilsey's memory and imagination as the tools that allow her faith and optimism to be sustainable, practical, and for all. The final chapter of the novel depicts Dilsey rising early on Easter Sunday morning and attending to the needs of the Compson home like starting the fire, preparing Mrs. Compson's water bottle, and making breakfast for the family and servants. She prevents the family from physical collapse through her morning routine, and as the day unfolds, it is clear that she also prevents the family from emotional collapse. Since the morning of the fourth chapter is Easter morning it is worth noting that Dilsey's early morning routine mirrors St. Matthew's account of the women who took burial spices to the grave of Christ on Easter morning. The women came to perform the needed physical task of treating the body and were rewarded by finding the risen Christ. In a similar way, Dilsey's Easter morning work in the Compson house preserves the bodies of those she serves, and in turn she finds joy as she revels in the church service and sings hymns as she works after returning home from the service. Dilsey's joy comes in a religious experience parallel to the women of St. Matthew's gospel. Dilsey, unlike any of the Compsons or their

servants, encounters a rapturous spiritual moment during the day that memorializes Christ's resurrection.

The church service and Dilsey's experience there reveal that her optimism and joy in her relation towards memory and imagination form the central aspect of her character. She remembers the past and imagines the future in a way that no one else in the novel does, a way that allows her not to be paralyzed by the past or disengaged by the future. The entire Easter Service is a Christian ritual that centers around remembering. The service is a memorial to Christ's resurrection, and as the minister moves from a measured Anglo speech pattern into his powerful native slang, he cries, "I got de ricklickshun en de blood of de Lamb" (295)! The recollection ("ricklickshun") or memory of Christ is what moves the minister and the congregation to a moment of joy and celebration. This type of remembering is different from any other in the novel because it is a communal remembering that goes beyond the self. Remembering for Quentin is done on his own and serves only to take him farther from the object of his memory and ultimately away from existence. Jason's refusal to remember and acknowledge Caddy isolates him, and while Benjy's memories do serve to bring him momentary solace, since he has no community to share them with, the positive capabilities of his memories are limited. But Dilsey remembers the resurrection of Christ within a community of shared rememberers which allows her to experience not only a moment of solace but also the sustained will to continue carrying the burdens of the Compson family as she has done for years.

Dilsey responds to the powerful ritual of memory that the service presents by openly weeping and uttering, "I've seed de first en de last" (297). Faulkner's text

remains ambiguous about what exactly Dilsey's emotion is at this point. Clearly, Dilsey is deeply moved, and her reference to seeing the first and the last seem to indicate that she has seen/experienced the Alpha and the Omega, the God who is the beginning and the end. Her words also could indicate her relationship with the Compson family. She has been with them from the beginning and now she has seen the end of the family line with Jason's refusal to marry and Benjy's state of impotence. Is she crying tears of joy from her moment of intense communal memory or tears of mourning over the ruin of the Compson family?

Hamblin analyzes Dilsey's experience:

So obsessed seems Dilsey with the final Compson disintegration that one suspects she does not even hear the Reverend Shegog's concluding remarks, stressing the traditional Easter message of resurrection and joy. If she has heard, the testament of faith and hope has brought her little consolation in her distress. Preoccupied as she is with the dissolution of the Compson family, Dilsey finds little cause to celebrate on this particular Easter Day. (15)

While Dilsey's emotional response at the service is not entirely clear, I think it is more a case of an abundance of emotion coming from multiple sources rather than as Hamblin suggests from a myopic concern with the Compsons. As the service rises to a fever pitch Faulkner writes, "In the midst of the voices and the hands Ben sat, rapt in his sweet blue gaze. Dilsey sat bold upright beside, crying rigidly and quietly in the annealment and the blood of the remembered lamb" (297). Faulkner directly tells readers that Dilsey is



engaged in the act of remembering the central symbol of the service, the Lamb, and since Ben is enjoying a rare moment of silence, Dilsey's mind does not have the reminder of the burden of the Compson family in that moment. What Dilsey remembers and how she remembers is different from any of the characters from the novel which provides an emotional stability and purposeful life that elude the other characters.

Though Faulkner never directly mentions imagination in reference to Dilsey nor does he allow readers into Dilsey's stream of consciousness as he does for other major characters, it is possible to read Dilsey's repeated chorus ("I've seed de first en de last") as not only an empowering memory of the past but also as an imagined projection of the future. During the church service, Faulkner depicts Dilsey as if she is in a trance or a religious rapture, and after the conclusion of the service Dilsey still appears to be in this state. Dilsey walks through a group of talking church members and she "continued to weep, unmindful of the talk" (297). She seems unaware of the world around her. In this state her speech and posture are that of a biblical prophet. She says of the minister, "He seed de power en de glory" as she walks like one set apart and detached from the group. In this context, when she says that she has "seed the last" it is possible that she is not referring to an actual moment she has seen that signifies the last (of the Compson family or the last of Southern decency) but to a prophetic-like vision she has just seen during the service of "the last." She has seen the last in her mind's eye; she has imagined it. Whether she has seen it in a prophetic-like vision during the service or she has daily foreseen it as she keeps the Compson family together, she has imagined the end, the collapse and destruction of the Compson family or even life itself and decided to carry on

in spite of it. Dilsey sees the history of the Compson family existing outside of time, in a state of *durée*, and she sees her religious experience including the promise of heaven as existing outside of time which provides the stamina and hope that allow her to persevere.

Dilsey imagines the future, which is not a bright one, and instead of committing suicide like Quentin or drawing into herself with bitterness and cynicism like Jason and Mrs. Compson, she chooses hope and generosity. But Thickstun does not see Dilsey's experience as broadly applicable. He writes, "For Dilsey, the tale of loss and suffering she has witnessed – the sound and the fury of the Compson tragedy- acquires meaning in its correspondence with the larger pattern of Christian history. But for Faulkner, Christian significance alone is not enough" (161). Granted, Dilsey's religious experience does not serve as a template through which other characters in the novel can access hope; however, Dilsey's experience with remembering inside a cultural context and within a community does present a viable option for others beside herself because it transcends religion while still impacting daily life for the individual.

After the service, Dilsey's feet are firmly planted back in the reality of her life as she instructs her recalcitrant children and grandchildren and returns to the Compson house to restart the fire, clean the house, and start cooking. By singing snatches of a hymn, Dilsey remembers the church service as she does these chores. Faulkner writes, "Dilsey moved about the kitchen, singing the two lines of the hymn which she remembered" (301). Dilsey's memory of the service and her religious experience also inform the way she comforts Benjy when he begins to howl after dinner. Dilsey says to Benjy, "You's de Lawd's chile, anyway. En I be Hisn' too, fo long, praise Jesus" (317).

The practical necessity of comforting Benjy (and maybe herself) is achieved through Dilsey's remembrance of the recent service. Dilsey's act of remembering and imagining inform the hopeful pragmatism that she practices daily.

Throughout *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner presents characters who are defined by their relation to memory and imagination. Characters are both destroyed and saved by how they remember and imagine. While the power of the past to haunt characters has long been a favorite topic of Faulkner scholars, rarely do scholars examine the potentially positive power of remembering the past and imagining the future. Since many of Faulkner's characters are haunted by memories of the past, scholars regularly conclude that Faulkner holds a modernist view of memory in which memory equals burden and dysfunction while forgetting equals functionality, but Faulkner's belief and presentation of memory does not match this description. Memory is always a powerful, often the most powerful, aspect of a character's being in Faulkner's novels, but the wide range of characters presented demonstrates a span from completely negative to completely positive effects of memory. Only after seeing that *The Sound and the Fury* does not reject memory but affirms it as necessary and potentially redemptive will readers understand that while life is a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing for Quentin, Jason, and Mrs. Compson, for Dilsey and perhaps even Benjy memory and imagination can create a redeemed past and a hopeful future.

### CHAPTER III

#### MEMORY AS THE MEANS TO MAKING MEANING IN *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

Just as in *The Sound and the Fury*, the memory of the past drives and defines the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!*. While memory acts as an agent that both destroys and saves in *The Sound and the Fury*, in *Absalom, Absalom!* memory serves as an agent through which characters obscure meaning, reveal meaning, or create meaning. As Mr. Compson, Quentin Compson, Rosa Coldfield, and Shreve narrate different aspects and versions of the legend of Thomas Sutpen, the reader is invited to piece together a history of the rise and fall of Sutpen laid out through the memories of the narrators. Each narrator has a different agenda for accessing and manipulating both personal memories and the memories of others. Henri Bergson's metaphor of a giant keyboard with thousands of keys which represent memories played by the rememberer serves as a useful template for understanding how the characters of *Absalom, Absalom!* "play" the memories of the Sutpen legend to varying degrees of success. By the end of the novel, Faulkner has forced the reader into actively participating in remembering the versions of the Sutpen legend and nearly acting as another narrator piecing together and interpreting the memories of the characters in order to create the meaning of the text. In his earlier major novels (*The Sound and the Fury* [1929], *As I Lay Dying* [1930], and *Light in August* [1932]), Faulkner presents memory as the defining aspect of character that determines either the destruction or salvation of individuals, but in *Absalom, Absalom!*,

Faulkner pushes memory's importance even deeper into the core of human experience. Faulkner presents memory as the way humans create reality in *Absalom, Absalom!*. In essence, the novel is a performance of memory in which author, characters, and reader all participate as meaning becomes created, obscured, and manipulated.

Ironically, the characters whose memories include the moments closest to the actual Sutpen legend are the ones who are the farthest from understanding the actual meaning of the Sutpen's life. Starting with Sutpen himself, Faulkner presents a man who intentionally removes himself as far as possible from his own past; he attempts to erase his past by creating a world safe from his origins as the son of a migrant share-cropper. Sutpen fails to see where he goes wrong in his "design" because he refuses to confront the memories of his past and ultimately perpetuates the cycle he tries to escape. Rosa Coldfield, Sutpen's sister-in-law and later spurned fiancé, is only a small step removed from the Sutpen legend. While she does not seek to erase the memories of the past, she uses them as a commodity to manipulate Quentin and to justify her hatred of Thomas Sutpen whom she casts in a demonic light. Quentin, another step further from the legend, is two generations removed from Sutpen. He has heard versions of the legend from his father, from Rosa, and he has grown up in the town of Jefferson, which naturally transmits the legend to its sons. Quentin enters the legend himself when he takes Rosa to Sutpen's Hundred to find the last in the line of Sutpen's bastardly heirs, and while Quentin draws conclusions about the meaning of the Sutpen legend that Thomas and Rosa do not, he turns the legend into a personal history that is not his to live. He is left trying to convince himself that he does not hate the South, the Sutpen legend, and

himself. Shreve, Quentin's Canadian roommate at Harvard, is the one Faulkner allows to successfully take on the memories of the others and orchestrate a meaning for the legend that is in all likely hood the closest to the truth. Shreve's narration of the Sutpen legend is that of the literary progenitor who reveals meaning through artistic rendering of the memories that Quentin, Rosa, and Sutpen have obscured. His ability to imagine and remember comes from his distance from the events and his concept of a fluid past that cannot be separated from the present. Just as Dilsey provides a modicum of stability and coherence for the Compson family in *The Sound and the Fury*, so too Shreve's role as an outsider allows him take on Quentin's memories of the Sutpen legend and produce coherent and insightful meaning.

Shreve's narration of the Sutpen legend operates in a way entirely unique from the other narrators. As a Canadian student at Harvard whose only experience with the South is the stories he hears from Quentin, Shreve narrates the Sutpen legend without an agenda or personal connection. Shreve's telling is pure theater, an artistic creation all his own. He perceives the Sutpen legend and the South in its entirety as a grand entertainment in which he is allowed to playfully participate. The haunting baggage of memory that prevents Rosa and Quentin from understanding the significance and meaning of the Sutpen legend does not enter Shreve's horizon. In a way, Shreve appropriates the tangled loose ends of the memories transmitted to him through Quentin and gives a fuller significance and sharper understanding. In this chapter I argue that Faulkner presents Shreve as a character who understands the memories of others better

than they do themselves and represents a type of remembering that values distancing oneself far enough away from the actual memory in order to accurately understand it.

If Shreve's distance from the events of the Sutpen legend allows him to piece together more accurately the memories of others and make a meaningful story out of them, then the reader of the novel acts as the "narrator" most removed and most in control of recreating memories into meaning. As the reader encounters pieces of the same story in different forms from different points of view all presented in interrupted chronology, he or she must remember and reconcile the memories of the narrators in order to create an understanding of Sutpen and of the significance of his legend. In this way, the reader must read like a detective looking for the clues buried in the memories of the characters. Just as the narrators piece together the facts and motives of the characters in the Sutpen legend, so too the reader participates in this creation of meaning as Faulkner presents fiction as type of communal process in which writer, characters, and reader all engage in the creation of a multifaceted meaning.

Henri Bergson's metaphor of memory as a giant keyboard also lends itself to a reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* that emphasizes memory's power to both obscure and reveal truth. In *Matter and Memory* Bergson writes of the mind in the act of remembering:

It is like an immense keyboard, on which the external object executes at once its harmony of a thousand notes, thus calling forth in a definite order, and at a single moment, a great multitude of elementary sensations corresponding to all the points of the sensory centre that are concerned.

Now, suppress the external object or the organ of sense, or both: the same elementary sensations may be excited, for the same strings are these, ready to vibrate in the same way; but where is the keyboard which permits thousands of them to be struck at one, and so many single notes to unite in one accord. In our opinion the 'region of images,' if it exists, can only be a keyboard of this nature. (165)

Bergson argues that within the mind exists a vast store of memories and images that an individual must constantly take stock of and call forth in order to make every decision from simple to complex. Since the mind often requires a multitude of memories or images at one moment, Bergson submits the metaphor of a giant keyboard on which memories correspond to keys on which a skillful player must strike harmonious chords of multiple notes. With this view of memory in mind, it could be argued that each individual playing his personal keyboard of memory does so with varying degrees of proficiency within varied complexities of a repertoire. Given this assertion, I argue that Shreve functions in *Absalom, Absalom!* as a grand conductor of the keyboards of memory. Sutpen submits a silent symphony of memories as he tries to suppress his past; Rosa plays discordant and manipulated memories for the sake of survival; and Quentin plays obsessively on someone else's keyboard only to find himself isolated. It is Shreve who conducts the masterful opus. His distance, perspective, and imaginative insight into the Sutpen legend allow him (and perhaps to a greater degree, the reader) to play "so many single notes to unite in one accord."



Scholars in the post-modern era tend to interpret *Absalom, Absalom!* as a text which rejects memory as an avenue to meaning and questions whether or not texts themselves can have meaning. For example, in “The Poetics of Ruptured Mnemosis: Telling Encounters in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*” Clifford E. Wulfman argues that the novel submits a statement of the futility of making meaning from memory. Wulfman writes that even for Shreve “the telling encounters almost always fail” (5). Additionally, Wulfman argues that *Absalom, Absalom!* “serve(s) as a warning to anyone who seeks out lost time” (1). In other words, Wulfman believes that Faulkner presents memory as purely destructive with no constructive potential. While memory obscures and denies meaning for characters like Sutpen, Rosa, and Judith, I argue that Faulkner does not discount the importance that memory plays in these characters’ quests for meaning. The quest for meaning is not always a failure, though, as Faulkner demonstrates through Shreve, who accesses and understands meanings held in the memories of others. These memories become Shreve’s own as he participates in the Sutpen legend by creating it.

Thomas Sutpen is the character around which the others in the novel revolve and upon whom the others cast their memories and conjectures. The man himself, however, is fairly removed from the narrative since what the reader knows of him comes second hand at best and often removed much farther through tellings and retellings of the details of his life. The most reliable place to start examining the role memories play in Sutpen’s life is not the text of the novel itself, but the chronology and genealogy provided after the close of the novel’s main text. The chronology and genealogy must be considered when

reading the novel since they provide a reliable record not dependant upon biased narrators. In the chronology and genealogy, Faulkner presents the barebones of Sutpen's life, which eventually evolve into legend. Sutpen is born in West Virginia to poor whites; he runs away from home and eventually marries a wife in Haiti; Sutpen arrives in Jefferson Mississippi where he marries Ellen Coldfield; and he is killed by a white squatter on his property, Sutpen's Hundred, after his family has collapsed in on itself. Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin, and Shreve ornament these facts of Sutpen's life as they each try to create meaning out of the legend that has evolved around him.

Other characters in the novel often define themselves by their relation to Sutpen's past, but how does Sutpen recount his own past and what impact does it have upon him? Sutpen can be read as the forgetter who cannot stop remembering. Sutpen's oldest memory is the one he tries hardest to forget but continually plagues him: the moment in his childhood when a well-dressed black servant dismissed him at the door of a rich white man's house. Greg Forter explains the significance of this early memory in Sutpen's life: "Sutpen's self is formed through the incursion of meanings that shape him before he even knows he has been subject to them" (275). Forter uses Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma to explain why this early memory of rejection so often returns to Sutpen and drives his cyclical behavior. Forter writes, "A punctual incursion of the mind, having 'dissociated' consciousness from itself, installs an unprocessed memory-trace that returns unbidden" (259). Forter's analysis demonstrates why Sutpen is the forgetter who cannot stop remembering; since Sutpen suppresses his traumatic childhood experience, he cannot control the way it resurfaces and drives him.

As Faulkner depicts the moment of Sutpen's rejection, he often presents it as an uncertain memory. Sutpen "didn't know, or remember, whether he had ever heard" why the family was to move to the place of his future rejection (181). Again Sutpen "didn't remember if it was weeks or a month or a year they traveled" to get to the new plantation where he would have the door slammed in his face (181). When young Sutpen encounters the rejection by the black servant at the front door, "he never even remembered what the nigger said" and he "didn't even remember leaving" (188). Before the incident at the rich planter's house, Sutpen had been enrolled in school, but "he didn't remember how he came to go to the school" (194). After Sutpen has run away and ponders his future, the one thing he does remember is something his teacher had read. Sutpen says, "So when the time came when I realized that to accomplish my design I should need first of all and above all things money in considerable quantities and in the quite immediate future, I remembered what he had read to us and I went to the West Indies" (196). Sutpen's rare moment of remembering fixates on the design by which he will be able to remove himself from his past and escape his own memory.

When he arrives in Jefferson, he is a man who refuses to reveal his past. The only person he trusts with information about his past is Quentin's grandfather, General Compson. Quentin's father narrates, "It was General Compson, who seemed to have known him well enough to offer to lend him seed cotton for his start, who knew any better, to whom Sutpen ever told anything about his past" (30-31). In place of his memory, Sutpen sets out to create a future that will serve as a barricade against his past. His creation of Sutpen's Hundred is a supreme act of imagination. He had "dragged

house and gardens out of virgin swamp” with his pack of “wild Negroes,” his French architect, and an iron-will, but his design fails (4). While his imagination constantly takes him forward, since he has forsaken his memory, he does not realize that his trajectory away from his past is not linear but cyclical.

Sutpen appears to create his design with strong ambivalence. On one hand he is motivated to achieve his design in order to be forever the one on the inside of the house with a well dressed servant slamming the door in the face of anyone or thing that could jeopardize his position and stability, but on the other he is motivated to create his design in order to orchestrate a moment in which he could enact the opposite gesture, to open the door instead of slam it on the child in need. As Sutpen imagines his design he thinks, “he would take that boy in where he would never again need to stand on the outside of a white door and knock at it: and not at all for mere shelter but so that that boy, that whatever nameless stranger, could shut that door himself forever behind him on all that he had ever known” (210). Sutpen wants to both protect and reject, but when his design is tested, his discipline of forgetting the unpleasant past is what undoes him. Charles Bon, Sutpen’s repudiated first son tinged with Negro blood, appears on the doorstep of Sutpen’s Hundred. Faulkner writes:

that he stood there at his own door, just as he had imagined, planned, designed, and sure enough and after fifty years the forlorn nameless and homeless lost child came to knock at it and no monkey-dressed nigger anywhere under the sun to come to the door and order the child away; and Father [Quentin narrates to Shreve] said that even then, even though he

knew that Bon and Judith had never laid eyes on one another, he must have felt and heard the design—house, position, posterity and all—come down like it had been built out of smoke. (215)

When Sutpen leaves Haiti along with his first wife and son, Charles Bon, he attempts to forget them, erase them. This is the pattern of his life, but the past keeps invading the present with Charles Bon, the forgotten son, standing at his doorstep, an incarnation of the past come to destroy Sutpen's escape from the inescapable.

Sutpen is fated to repeat the past over and over. After his design crumbles at the appearance of Charles Bon, Sutpen again attempts to produce a male child with Rosa Coldfield whom he courts but then alienates by revealing that he is interested in her only as a bearer of male children. Sutpen's final attempt to achieve his design is through Milly Jones, the granddaughter of Wash Jones, a shiftless squatter on Sutpen's hundred. When Sutpen's child with Milly is born a female, he rejects both mother and child, and Wash kills Sutpen. Each reiteration of Sutpen's attempt to achieve his design places him in a lower social strata and in a more outright attempt to forget his past. Every attempt to create his design is an act of willful forgetting for Sutpen. He will not directly address the reasons that prevent him from success because his greatest desire is to remove himself from the past. Faulkner's statement about memory through Sutpen is not that memories destroy but that memories are inevitable and must be acknowledged. Sutpen fails to recognize the importance of his own past, and Faulkner suggests that this failure is his tragic flaw. Jason Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* functions similarly. As Jason denies the decline of the Compson family and rejects the memory of Caddy, he plunges

himself into isolation and cruelty. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner does not reject memory's power for making meaning with Sutpen; he demonstrates the tragic results of those who reject their own memories.

Interpreted through a Bergsonian lens, Sutpen's keyboard of memory images is over-crowded with conflicting notes, but so is the case with every individual. What prevents Sutpen from successfully orchestrating these memories and uniting them "in one accord" is Sutpen's rejection of the memories in the first place. If his desire is to overcome the past and protect himself from it, then the only successful approach would be to confront the inevitability of the past. Bergson states memory is in part "capricious" and not entirely within the mind's control (*Memory and Matter* 102). Sutpen hopes to replace every note on the keyboard of his memory with entirely new ones instead of playing the ones with which he inevitably has accumulated. By rejecting his past, he unknowingly rejects the possibility of a future, and thus cannot create any new meaning for his life because he has rejected the meaning of his past.

While Sutpen forms the central legend around which *Absalom, Absalom!* revolves, the reader only hears his words and encounters his deeds through the remembrances and conjectures of narrators who operate at varying degrees of distance from the man himself. Rosa Coldfield is one of those narrators, and the manner in which she remembers Sutpen and engages the past forms the defining aspect of her character. Unlike Sutpen, Rosa does not attempt to outrun or forget her past, but she takes hold of the past in an attempt to preserve herself. From the first chapter of the novel, Rosa uses her memory of the past as a bargaining chip to persuade Quentin to accompany her out to

the ruined remains of Sutpen's hundred. Her memory is that of the pragmatist. She acknowledges the pragmatic and economical aspect of memory in her conversation with Quentin. She says, "Maybe some day you will remember this and write about it. You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazines" (5). Although the memory of Sutpen is infinitely personal to Rosa, she recognizes that memories at their core are useful and usable in a practical sense.

Rosa sees Quentin as the vessel of memory who carries the final chapter of the Sutpen legend which she hopes will give her a sense of closure. Mr. Compson reflects on Rosa as he speaks to Quentin: "She chose you because your grandfather was the nearest thing to a friend which Sutpen ever had in this county, and she probably believes that Sutpen may have told your grandfather something about himself and her" (8). Rosa hopes that Quentin has preserved a memory passed down through his family that will give her a key to the memories she holds and the rejection she bore at the hands of Sutpen. That memory has value to her and she hopes to bargain with Quentin for access to it by suggestion that he turn the story of the Sutpen legend into literary commodity for himself. While Rosa wants Quentin's memories to reveal a truth to her about Sutpen, she also perceives those same memories as potentially holding value not as truth but as commodity.

Rosa also recognizes the importance of keeping memories intact and stable regardless of whether or not they are accurate. Part of her quest to return to the ruins of Sutpen's Hundred is to solidify her interpretation of Sutpen's life in relation to that of her

own. She remembers Sutpen as “fiend blackguard and devil,” and she must repeatedly confirm this notion of him to herself while at the same time living with the knowledge that she was engaged to him out self-preservation (10). Rosa, through a force of will, creates a memory and a reality for herself that is more concerned with survival than accuracy. Shreve alludes to Rosa’s comment that “there are some things that just have to be whether they are or not, have to be a damn sight more than some other things that maybe are and it don’t matter a damn whether they are or not” (258). Rosa forces her memories into something that will hold her world together. Rosa demonstrates her need to remember a world that makes sense to her regardless of accuracy when she recalls imagining Ellen’s engagement as her own. Rosa narrates, “It was all I had because there is that might-have been which is the single rock we cling to above the maelstrom of unbearable reality” (120). For Rosa, this “might-have been” defines the past. “Might-have been” replaces what has been and allows Rosa to survive and make meaning, albeit an obscured meaning of her existence.

Rosa’s need to keep her memory intact, regardless of accuracy, fuels her return to the ruins of Sutpen’s Hundred. She knows something is lurking out there, and her memory and hatred of Sutpen is attached to it. As Shreve narrates Rosa’s return to Sutpen’s Hundred he says, “hating is like drink or drugs and she had used it so long that she did not dare risk cutting off the supply” (299). Rosa is in the truest sense a user of memory. Like an addict, she uses her memory of Sutpen to fuel a hatred that contributes directly to her survival. In fact, Rosa speaks directly about memory as if it were a purely physical process. She says, “That is the substance of remembering—sense, sight, smell:



the muscles with which we see and hear and feel—not mind, not thought: there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for...Ay, grief goes, fades; we know that—but ask the tear ducts if they have forgotten how to weep” (115). In this soliloquy, Rosa attempts to distance herself from her own painful memories and view them purely within the context of her own physical survival. Regardless of her own denouncement of memory, Rosa plays the keyboard of memory in such a way that music is created for herself, but not necessarily for others; the chords she strikes are meaningful and not discordant for her, but they may sound untrue for others. Although Rosa’s mode of remembering involves intentional manipulation, she does not entirely reject memory like Sutpen. Faulkner demonstrates that, despite its limited results, remembering in Rosa’s mode can produce something positive like self-preservation, whereas a complete rejection of memory in Sutpen’s case results in tragic destruction.

Rosa’s niece, Judith Sutpen, daughter of Thomas Sutpen born before Rosa, forms a unique counterpoint to Rosa’s relation to memory. Rosa sees memory as a means to preserving life, but Judith sees the ultimate aim of life as being remembered once gone. As an offspring of Thomas Sutpen, Judith appears to have inherited her father’s emphasis on the value of creating an enduring legacy. Through his grand design, Sutpen attempts to outrun his past and create a dynasty that will forever be protected from the disadvantages and slights he experienced as a boy. Sutpen’s dismissal of Bon as an acceptable heir, his probationary engagement with Rosa, and the rejection of his female child with Milly Jones are all acts motivated by his desire for a legacy. Judith, although

female, seems to be the most apparent ideological heir to Sutpen, and her relation to memory follows accordingly.

Faulkner reveals most pointedly Judith's desire to preserve her memory and the legacy of her family in chapter four when Mr. Compson continues explaining the Sutpen legend to Quentin and gives him the letter that Bon sent to Judith. For Judith, the letter, though not an ode of love is an artifact that preserves her connection to Bon and establishes the "might-have been" of a legacy. Mr. Compson explains Judith's intense desire to be preserved through memory when she gives the letter to Mr. Compson's mother. In passing the letter to someone else, Judith hopes to create a lasting memory and legacy for herself. Judith says:

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 can't be *is* because it never can become *was* because it can't ever die or perish. (101)

Judith expresses a nihilistic view in which life is the brief and confusing passing into a grave marked by a head stone that fails to preserve any significant memory. For Judith, a

memory can only last if it can change and even die. Her act of giving the letter to Quentin's grandmother is a gesture through which she hopes to make a scratch more lasting than anything done on a granite headstone. Unlike Rosa who uses memory to preserve her life, Judith uses her life to try to preserve a memory of herself in others. Much like Sutpen, who attempts to erase his past through his grand design, Judith is willing to let the actuality of her life be forgotten so long as some memory of her, no matter how small or inaccurate, be preserved. Judith preserves a meaning for her life through the memory of others and in this way lends significance and perhaps immortality to her existence despite obscuring meaning in the process.

Quentin and Shreve are the members of the youngest generation who preserve Judith by remembering her memories and retelling her tales as well as those of the other cast members in the Sutpen drama. The mode in which Quentin and Shreve remember is significantly different from the way the characters above remember. For the most part the two roommates remember someone else's memories. Shreve is the furthest from the events of the Sutpen legend, and despite Quentin's entrance into the legend as a participant in Rosa's trip to Sutpen's Hundred, the story does not belong to him. The legend of Sutpen, however, has a profound effect on Quentin; as he recreates the story with Shreve in their Harvard dorm room, he wrestles with his own identity and his relation to the past. Quentin, as a rememberer, seems bound by the past and in a losing battle against his own inevitable recollections. Peter Ramos notes the power the Sutpen legend holds over Quentin. Ramos writes that Quentin is "so obsessed with and consumed by the past as to be a ghost" (3). Quentin is a slave to memory, but that

memory is not even one of his own. In *Quentin*, Faulkner presents a character who, like Sutpen, is undone by his relation to the past, but whereas Sutpen rejects the past that belongs to him, Quentin obsesses about a past that does not belong to him. The result is the same for both of them: isolation and death.

What drives Quentin to obsessively remember the Sutpen story may not be clear, but it is evident that it haunts him. When Shreve asks him, “Tell about the South. What’s it like there. What do they do they do there. Why do they live there,” Quentin chooses to narrate (and Shreve eventually joins in the narration) the Sutpen legend (142). As the two are drawn deeper into the story, the legend haunts Quentin and invades his consciousness on a level beyond his control. Quentin thinks, “I have heard too much, I have been told too much; I have had to listen to too much, too long” (168). Faulkner further demonstrates Quentin’s uncomfortable closeness to the story when he describes Shreve and Quentin entering the Sutpen story as doubles of Henry and Bon. Faulkner writes, “So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas eve: four of them and then just two—Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry” (167). Not only does Quentin become a participant as Henry’s double or ghost, but he also becomes ghost-like in his present tense form as a student at Harvard. Ramos writes, “While he did not actually witness Sutpen’s rise to and fall from power, Quentin nevertheless feels so compelled to take responsibility for knowing Sutpen’s past that he embodies it now, in the present” (3). As Quentin embodies the Sutpen legend his own identity is erased as he becomes nothing more than the ghostly rememberer of ghosts not related to him.

Quentin is certainly haunted by memories that are not his own, but it could be suggested that what actually haunts him are his own unacknowledged memories that parallel the details of the Sutpen legend. In order to argue this position, *Absalom, Absalom!* must be read in concert with *The Sound and the Fury*, and Quentin's character must be interpreted as coherently connected in Faulkner's mind across the two novels. Ramos suggests that in *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin is already a ghost in a manner of speaking because Faulkner killed him years earlier in *The Sound and the Fury*. Ramos writes, "Quentin is a ghost in more than one sense. He has, after all, already died in *The Sound and the Fury* which was published before but which takes place chronologically after the events in *Absalom, Absalom!* and so we know that Quentin is on his way to death" (7). If this is the case, readers know a great deal more about Quentin than what is presented in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and perhaps his involuntary connection to the Sutpen legend can be interpreted as a sub-conscious fixation on or repression of his own personal past and familial conflicts. His tortured relationship with his sister Caddy is the central conflict that drives Quentin to obsessive recollection and ultimately suicide in *The Sound and the Fury*. Quentin's sexual desire for his sister coupled with his paradoxical desire to serve as her chivalrous protector mirror the actions of Henry and Bon. Just as Quentin attempts an adolescent duel with Dalton Ames to protect Caddy, Henry kills Bon at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred to protect Judith. Just as Bon enters into an incestuous engagement with Judith, Quentin imagines having an incestuous relationship with his sister Caddy.

Quentin does not make this aspect of his personal connection to the Sutpen legend explicit, but his reaction to his father's narration suggests the connection. As Mr. Compson reaches the dramatic high point between Bon and Judith, Quentin stops listening and leaves. Faulkner writes:

He (Quentin) walked out of his father's talking at last because it was now time to go, not because he had heard it all because he had not been listening since he had something which he still was unable to pass: that door, that gaunt tragic dramatic self-hypnotised youth face like the tragedian in a college play... the sister facing him across the wedding dress which she was not to use. (142)

Quentin cannot get past this moment between Bon and Judith because it is too much like his own incestuous experience. Although Quentin never reveals these conflicts in *Absalom, Absalom!*, they may form the basis for his strong ambivalence towards the Sutpen legend. If the novel is read as one that depicts characters using memory as the means to make meaning, Quentin's recollections of the Sutpen legend serve as a tool for him to make meaning of his own memories. Quentin's act of remembering is doomed, though. He distracts himself and confuses his own conflicts with memories that do not belong to him. As the novel concludes, Shreve asks Quentin, "Why do you hate the South," and Quentin responds as if trying to convince himself, "I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!" (303). For Quentin the South is represented by the Sutpen legend, and the Sutpen legend represents his own life. As Quentin attempts to convince himself that he does not hate the South, he is attempting to convince himself that he does not hate his past and his memories. Since Quentin substitutes someone else's memories

for his own, he is unable to make significant meaning of his own, and he is left frantically attempting to deny his self-loathing at the novel's close. Quentin fails to make meaning from these memories because he appropriates memories that do not belong to him while rejecting those that do. Faulkner again affirms the importance of memory to making meaning for oneself by depicting Quentin, who desperately tries to do so but tragically fails.

While Shreve, like Quentin, seems to adopt memories that do not belong to him, Shreve is not haunted by the Sutpen legend and ultimately discovers truths about the legend that those closest to it can not access. Faulkner presents Shreve as a grand maestro of memory who accesses the memories of Quentin and, through Quentin, the memories of the cast of characters comprising the Sutpen legend. Through these memories, Shreve reveals meaning where Quentin and others have obscured, changed, or covered over meaning. As Shreve narrates the Sutpen legend, he images the story with a literary flare unique to him alone. Through Shreve, Faulkner suggests the possibility for the artist or literary progenitor to create meaning through memory that reveals truth instead of obscuring or warping truth.

Scholars debate Shreve's ability to make meaning of memories that do not belong to him. On one side of the debate Clifford E. Wulfman argues that Shreve's narration fails to give coherence or significance to the Sutpen legend. Wulfman writes, "signifier and signified are there, but they cannot be brought together into signification" (4). For Wulfman, the novel questions whether or not reading and story-telling are viable activities. In Wulfman's analysis, Shreve's narration actually perpetuates the traumas

initiated by Sutpen: “although the aim of telling is transmission of traumatic material with the hope for its retention by consciousness and its eventual dispersal, the telling encounters themselves become traumatic events” (14). Francois Pitavy in “The Narrative Voice and Function of Shreve” argues the counterpoint to Wulfman, interpreting Shreve as the character who holds the novel together “as co-creator in the narrative” (190). Pitavy identifies Shreve as a surrogate of Faulkner, weaving a coherent text out of experiences that seem incoherent to those experiencing them. While I concede to Wulfman that Quentin’s experience as a teller and listener could be characterized as traumatic, I argue along with Pitavy that Shreve’s experience is far different. In a lecture at the University of Virginia, Faulkner himself noted Shreve’s uniqueness as a narrator: “Shreve was the commentator that held the [story] to something of reality” (Pitavy 190). I argue that Shreve experiences the telling encounters with relish as a literary creator who makes meaning out of the shards of Quentin’s haunted memories.

Bergson’s philosophy of intuition lends itself to understanding Faulkner’s presentation of Shreve as a rememberer who produces truth and insight. In his *Introduction to Metaphysics* Bergson explains how individuals understand the present moment by perceiving it as an extension of past moments and states that interconnect with other individuals. Instead of constantly methodically analyzing every past moment, the mind operates through intuition based on these past moments. Bergson compares this act to a reader who understands the essence of a character by inserting himself into the character about whom he is reading. Bergson writes, “The character would be given to me all at once, in its entirety, and the thousand incidents which manifest it, instead of



adding themselves to the idea and so enriching it, would seem to me, on the contrary, to detach themselves from it, without, however, exhausting it or impoverishing its essence” (3-4). Intuition transcends analysis and hard data, but, in Bergson’s view, can be more faithful to the essence of a truth or a character. Bergson continues, “I have rejected all translations in order to possess the original” (3). Bergson uses the metaphor of intuitively interpreting a literary character to explain the way actual people process experience and personal identity. Getting past representation allows individuals to perceive essence, and this act is precisely what Shreve accomplishes as he becomes the conduit for Quentin’s memories by understanding them through intuiting and imagining.

Throughout the second half of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Faulkner depicts Shreve’s ability to remember and imagine in a way that reveals meaning. Shreve narrates sections that contain the most central events of the Sutpen legend. Faulkner describes Shreve and Quentin entering into the legend indicating Shreve’s intuitive understanding of the legend: “there was now not two of them but four, the two who breathed not individuals now yet something both more and less than twins” (236). Later in the chapter, Faulkner comments on Shreve’s intuitive recreation of the legend: “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” (243). Shreve uses his own memories of what Quentin has relayed to him about the legend to create a version of the legend more accurate and artistic than any of those who held the memories originally. Shreve becomes a memory holder as well as a memory interpreter. Faulkner further privileges Shreve’s voice by using a rare third person narrator. When Shreve imagines a scene

between Henry, Bon, Sutpen, and Sutpen's Haitian wife, Faulkner writes, "four of them who sat in that drawing room of baroque and fusty magnificence which Shreve had invented and which was probably true enough" (268). *Absalom, Absalom!* includes very little third person narration (usually employed only to describe physical details like Shreve and Quentin's dorm room) so Faulkner's use of it affirms Quentin's understanding of the Sutpen legend and marks an authorial confirmation of Shreve's intuition.

Faulkner further validates Shreve's depiction of the legend by choosing him to narrate sections of the legend that are most poignant and mysterious. For example, Shreve corrects Mr. Compson's understanding of Henry's relationship with Bon. Shreve says, "Because your old man was wrong here, too" (275). Shreve imagines/deduces that Bon found Henry wounded in battle and that Henry asked Bon to let him die. This would allow Bon to marry Judith without Henry's knowledge demonstrating Henry's sacrificial love for Bon. Shreve's distance from the events allows him to remember imaginatively in a way that produces understanding and meaning. Faulkner also chooses Shreve to narrate Bon's poignant desire to be acknowledged by his father, Sutpen. Shreve says, "what he was thinking was *Maybe he will write it then. He would just have to write 'I am your father. Burn this' and I would do it*" (261). Faulkner does not allow the other narrators this type of access to Bon's psyche, but Shreve, as the maestro of other people's memories most clearly perceives the meaning of Bon's actions.

As Shreve remembers and reiterates the memories that have created the Sutpen legend, he does so with an imagination and theatricality far beyond Quentin's haunted

and debilitated recollections. When Shreve takes up the narration for the first time he casts the Sutpen legend as a literary epic. Shreve says, “she [Rosa] wouldn’t have to go out there and be betrayed by the old meat and find instead of a widowed Agamemnon to her Cassandra an ancient stiff-jointed Pyramus to her eager though untried Thisbe” (144). As chapter seven begins, Shreve again casts the Sutpen legend as a literary work over which he presides and quips, “Jesus, the South is fine, isn’t it. It’s better than the theatre, isn’t it. It’s better than Ben Hur, isn’t it” (176). When Shreve takes up the narration in chapter eight, he does so by saying, “Let me play a while now,” as if he is an actor entering a scene and interpreting a script for an audience (234). Shreve’s distance from the actual events allows him to more fully understand them, and his literary imagination, or Bergsonian intuition, makes him Faulkner’s choice for creating meaning out of the memories of others.

Along with Shreve, the reader becomes a distant rememberer and imaginer who is privileged with an understanding of the events of the Sutpen legend that are withheld even from eye witnesses. Pitavy observes, “Shreve, then, has a function *in* the novel analogous to that of the reader *of* the novel, capable of distancing, hence of comprehension” (192). The reader journeys through the novel’s presentation of multiple versions of the Sutpen legend told out of chronology through different perspectives. The reader must participate in the task of remembering the details and attempt to arrange them into some coherence, but the story continues to change and every new detail forces the reader to adjust his or her understanding and memory of the Sutpen legend. Faulkner describes Quentin and Shreve fully entering the story as “four of them and then just

two—Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry,” but a fifth character is there too; Faulkner pulls the reader into actively remembering the earlier details of the legend to create the present scene.

Faulkner thrusts the reader deeper into the creation of the legend in a section that appears to be narrated by no one. Quentin and Shreve stop narrating the legend, and Faulkner writes, “He ceased again. It was just as well, since he had no listener. Then suddenly he had no talker either” (280). Although neither Quentin nor Shreve are speaking, the narration begins again, and the text proceeds in italics indicating an internal monologue. The scenes presented include the conversation between Henry and Sutpen while the two are camped as soldiers in the Civil War and the conversation in which Bon urges Henry to kill him. Faulkner does not make it clear to whom the internal monologue belongs. Pitavy argues that the section is the conflation of Quentin’s mind with Shreve’s. Pitavy writes, “The two narrators do not propose two different views of Sutpen’s story, but two complementary aspects of the same view, to the point where their perspectives coincide in a single immediate vision, at the end of chapter 8” (198). While this section could be the collective mind of Quentin and Shreve, the section’s style is uncharacteristically simple and does not include the theatricality of Shreve’s narration or the haunted quality of Quentin’s narration. The section includes extended dialogue between Henry and Sutpen, which is rare, and simple traditionally punctuated sentences, which is also rare. The section reads as if it is performed by a new and inexperienced narrator, as if it is the voice of the reader remembering, imagining, and creating the legend. Just as Faulkner turns to a third-person narrator devoid of his characteristic

stream of consciousness style when he presents Dilsey's powerful engagement with memory in the final chapter of *The Sound and the Fury*, so too Faulkner shifts to a simpler style at the most poignant moment of collective (Shreve-Quentin-Reader-Author) remembering in *Absalom, Absalom*. When the section in italics ends, Shreve re-enters as narrator. Faulkner's ambiguity about who narrates this section suggests that the telling of the legend takes on a life of its own that is propelled forward without the aid of a narrator because it has taken up residence in the memory and imagination of the reader by the final chapters of the novel.

If Shreve's distance from the legend allows him a keener insight, then the reader takes on the role of the most distant rememberer and ultimately is charged with remembering the events of the legend in a way that creates meaning. While Faulkner demonstrates the debilitating potential of memory through Sutpen, Rosa, Judith, and Quentin who reject, manipulate, and/or obsess over the past, *Absalom, Absalom!* also depicts the potential for memory paired with imagination to reveal truth and sustain meaning through the character of Shreve and through the participation of the reader's memory.

## CHAPTER IV

### MEMORY AS PRESERVATION IN *THE UNVANQUISHED*

William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* does not receive as much critical attention as *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* because scholars often view it as a pot-boiler designed to take advantage of a public eager for Civil War fiction after the publication of *Gone with the Wind*, but the novel actually renders a complex statement about the central theme of Faulkner's oeuvre, the power of remembering the past. In *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner examines how memory provides a basis for black, white, male and female individuals to survive the Civil War as well as how memory functions to preserve communities as a whole. New Historicists and gender scholars study the novel for Faulkner's ability to capture a wide span of Southerners' reactions to the Civil War or his portrayal of the female warrior; however, beyond that the novel examines how humans, particularly those under duress, use imagination and memory to preserve themselves and create a better world in which to live.

Scholars who write about imagination and memory in Faulkner's works have left *The Unvanquished* untouched, and many of the scholars of the 60s and 70s did not even consider the novel a worthy member of Faulknerian canon. Prominent 1960s scholar J. Gold called *The Unvanquished* a "rather simple and unprofound drama" (49). As the

novel became more critically in vogue in the 80s and 90s, criticism tended towards gender studies. In the novel Bayard Sartoris's female cousin Drusilla cuts her hair short and rides with the Confederate army. June Dwyer's article "Feminization, Masculinization, and the Role of the Woman Patriot in *The Unvanquished*" in which she studies the liberties and limitations of femininity in the novel is typical of the gender driven studies of the novel that dominate recent criticism. The annual Faulkner convention held at Mississippi State University, *Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha* accepted only one submission on *The Unvanquished* in the 1990s, and it was Deborah's Clarke's "Gender, War, and Cross-Dressing in *The Unvanquished*." Due to a preoccupation with gender studies, the importance of memory and imagination has not been recognized in the novel. Understanding Faulkner's emphasis of memory and imagination in *The Unvanquished* allows readers to view it in the mainstream of Faulkner's continuation of his most central theme.

In *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner's presentation of memory goes beyond his presentation in either *The Sound and the Fury* or *Absalom, Absalom!*. While Faulkner validates memory as potentially constructive and redemptive through a select few characters like Dilsey and Shreve in the two earlier novels, in *The Unvanquished* nearly every character exhibits a relation to memory that contributes to his or her preservation. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Rosa's memory, which is often intentionally inaccurate, contributes to her self-preservation, but in doing so, she becomes isolated and bitter. The characters of *The Unvanquished* who use memory, often inaccurate memories, to preserve themselves and their communities do not suffer the same fate as Rosa. Faulkner

presents characters for whom memory produces resilience, but not at the cost of retreating into isolation. *The Unvanquished* presents Faulkner's most hopeful vision of memory for the endurance of humanity anticipating the optimism he later articulated in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. In the speech, Faulkner concludes by stating that despite the growing concern of a nuclear holocaust, mankind will preserve and even thrive:

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 ding-dong 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.

(Cowley 650)

*The Unvanquished* echoes Faulkner's optimism about humanity's destiny to not only endure but also to prevail; the novel presents Faulkner's hopeful vision for humanity in which life and community are preserved through memory.

As in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson provide a theoretical background for understanding Faulkner's presentation of memory in *The Unvanquished*. Throughout the novel, Faulkner presents characters who remember or forget the past in ways that serve preservation, but may not be strictly accurate. Nietzsche affirms this practice in "The Use and Abuse of History" when he writes, "We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life"



(59). Remembering accurately simply for the sake of accuracy does not serve life; it serves history, and in this novel Faulkner presents characters whose memories serve life. Bergson's theory of the duration of time echoes Nietzsche's emphasis that memory should serve life rather than history. For Bergson, when the individual attempts to isolate moments of the past through analysis, he or she loses the ability to participate in the experiential flux of time. Reality is perceived, for Bergson, not through analysis but through intuition. Bergson calls the process *durée* often translated "duration." In his preface to Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, Pogson writes, "For him reality is not to be reached by any elaborate construction of thought: it is given in immediate experience as a flux, a continuous process of becoming, to be grasped by intuition, by sympathetic insight" (vi). Like Nietzsche, Bergson recognizes that a slavish remembrance of dissected and analyzed moments of the past leads to a "patch work of dead fragments" rather than life (Pogson vi). For both Bergson and Nietzsche, simply reconstructing the past for the sake of accuracy produces sterility. Faulkner presents characters who are capable of survival under duress because they operate by remembering intuitively and imaginatively rather than by strict analysis.

While scholar Thadious M. Davis does not write specifically about Faulkner's use of memory and imagination in *The Unvanquished*, her analysis lends itself to understanding that how the characters in the novel participate in creating a livable world through memory and imagination. Davis examines how Richard Wright and William Faulkner create landscape, characters, and even their own literary careers through imagination. Davis writes, "Both made themselves what they were, wrote their way into

being by reconstituting their concrete pasts and by transfiguring their actual places in the world" (469). Davis sees Faulkner as actively creating or forming himself as a writer by reinventing his own past through an intuitive and transformational memory. This is precisely what Faulkner's characters do in *The Unvanquished*. Living in Bergsonian duration, the characters remember a reality intuitively and make it a fact of life that transcends the analysis of objective data living. Davis continues to write about Faulkner's creative imaginative process at work in sculpting reality: "...Faulkner deviate(s) from the everyday life of the stale and intensifies selected, ordinary experience in order to draw attention to the imaginative reality...perceived as truth" (472). While Davis sees the role of imagination in creating reality as a part of Faulkner's creative process in writing his characters, she does not go the next step to see that Faulkner's characters perform the same process. Both Faulkner and the characters of *The Unvanquished* employ imaginative and intuitive memory to create reality for themselves.

Faulkner presents three primary aspects in which memory serves to preserve individuals and communities in *The Unvanquished*. First, memory protects the young boys Bayard and Ringo as they journey toward maturation without the guidance of adult males. Bayard journeys from a young boy pretending to be General Pemberton to an adolescent who avenges the murder of his grandmother and finally becomes a young man who chooses peace instead of violence. Secondly, memory preserves those who have lost their pasts as a result of the system of slavery. As the Civil War rages, the freed slaves journey northward and are preserved by memories that have been passed down to them through generations. Finally, the defeated communities of the South find a way to

rebuild and restore themselves through remembering (or perhaps creating for the first time) an honorable Southern tradition. In each situation, memory and imagination function as means to create past, present, and future reality for characters who find themselves in unbearable conditions or in conditions that they cannot reconcile to their view of the world and their place in it. Just as Benjy's soothing memories of Caddy afford him a degree of stability and Dilsey's act of remembrance at the Easter Sunday church service allow her to persevere, so too the act of remembering the past as alive allows the characters of *The Unvanquished* to survive and ultimately to prevail.

Bayard's and Ringo's engagement of imagination and memory plays a significant role in how they mature into adults and pass through the initiations of manhood of Southern society during the Civil War. Imagination and memory usher the boys from children playing at battles to actual young soldiers in a real military encounter and from scared boys hiding under Granny's skirts to young avengers seeking the life of Granny's killer. Faulkner demonstrates a progression, particularly in the case of Bayard, of the boys' moving from violence towards peace. In the first half of the novel, memory protects the boys from becoming hardened by the violence they participate in and witness. In the final section of the novel, "An Odor of Verbena," memory allows Bayard to escape the cycle of violence and find a peaceful solution to the murder of his father. Bayard no longer operates as a violent adolescent and uses memory to achieve a peaceful alternative to revenge.

Bayard's journey towards maturity through memory begins with the first scene of the novel. The first paragraph describes the miniature reproduction of the battle of

Vicksburg created by Bayard and Ringo with wood chips and dirt mounds. They take turns imagining to be Generals Pemberton and Grant imagining Pemberton as a victorious Southern general despite the fact that Vicksburg has just fallen to the North, a fact that the boys find out later and fail to process. In the imagined battle, the boys fling dirt and yell "Kill the bastuds! Kill them! Kill them!" at the imaginary Yankees (7). As the war comes closer to their home, Bayard and Ringo move from imagining a battle to hiding out in the woods hoping to spot the Union army before it arrives at the plantation. While keeping a lookout for the army, Bayard daydreams about seeing the Yankee army, and it suddenly appears. Bayard and Ringo dart back to the house, take down the rifle hanging above the fireplace, and get in position to shoot a Yankee officer. The boys are still young enough that the gun's size requires both of them to aim and shoot it while whispering to each other, "Shoot the bastud! Shoot him!" (26). This is the same phrase the boys used in their play and connects the imagined scene to the actual scene. By drawing this parallel, Faulkner suggests that while Bayard and Ringo do not have older males to guide them through this moment of macho male initiation, the power of memory stands in and fills the role as the boys' recollection of their play in the past becomes a part of the present moment in the confrontation with the Yankee soldiers. Duration guides the boys. Although memory and duration thrust the boys into violence in this scene, Bayard and Ringo are preserved in a moment of initiation by memory.

Memory continues to provide a safety net for Bayard and Ringo as they navigate the Civil War as young boys. Bayard states that his imaginary battle of Vicksburg with Ringo creates, "a shield between ourselves and reality, between us and fact and doom"

(4). Several times throughout the novel Bayard imagines that he and Ringo are "the two supreme undefeated like two moths, two feathers riding above a hurricane" (7). Despite his naiveté, the safety that Bayard imagines for himself and Ringo remains a reality as Bayard lives in the remembered world of duration rather than living paralyzed in the analyzed deadness of fixity. Faulkner demonstrates to his readers that Bayard recognizes the value of this model of memory even as an adult since the novel is narrated by a mature Bayard reflecting on the events from the distant vantage point of time. Although Faulkner does not suggest that believing something necessarily makes it a reality, he does suggest that Bayard's model of remembering keeps him calm and stable enough to ensure his safety when it becomes threatened.

The boys recognize the importance of memory to their survival when they leave the plantation to travel north looking for Col. Sartoris. As Granny and the boys travel by wagon, Ringo reveals that he has brought with him a clod of dirt from home. Bayard is willing to trade the buckle that fell from the Yankee horse they shot in order to possess the dirt clod. Bayard observes "it was more than Sartoris earth, it was Vicksburg too; the yelling was in it, the embattled, the iron-worn, the supremely invincible" (55). For Bayard, the dirt holds the memories of home that provide security for him. When Bayard possesses the dirt clod in the present moment on the journey, he is connected in a state of duration to the moments of the past when he felt safe. Preserving the dirt preserves the memories that have preserved Bayard.

Memory again serves as an agent of preservation for the young boys in another moment of violence. Several years after attempting to shoot the Yankee officer, the boys

embark on a quest to avenge the man who brutally killed Granny, a raider called Grumby. This time the violence is premeditated in a very real context, not just a playful imaginary one, and the boys summarily execute Grumby after tracking him down. Memory works as a coping method for the 15 year old Bayard as he tries to square his violence with his inherited notion of Southern honor. Instead of remembering the actual moment of killing, Bayard remembers with great detail everything before and after the moment.

Bayard narrates:

Then it happened. I know what did happen, but even now I don't know how, in what order...I reckon I heard the sound, and I reckon I must have heard the bullets, and I reckon I felt him when he hit me, but I don't remember it. I just remember the two bright flashes and the gray coat rushing down, and then the ground hitting me. (182-183)

Bayard's memory works as a barrier between the harsh realities of his young life and his desire to live according to a noble code. Faulkner shows his readers how this function of memory can protect a youth in a moment of trauma and how the human mind under duress can find ways to carve out a livable world. Faulkner positively presents this aspect of the mind as it ultimately prevents Bayard from becoming a hardened man of violence like his father.

As Bayard matures, his memory evolves from functioning solely as an agent of preservation into an agent of redemption for him and his community. In the last chapter, "An Odor of Verbena," Bayard, aged 24, must decide how to approach B.J. Redmond who has murdered Bayard's father, Col. Sartoris. Despite the expectations of his family

and community, Bayard manages to find a way to settle the score without the use of violence and at the same time manage not to be perceived as a coward by the community. Bayard's memory becomes the tool that enables him to achieve this task. As he prepares to meet Redmond, Bayard, receives advice from George Wyatt about how he should take a pistol instead of a derringer to kill Redmond. Instead of listening to the advice, Bayard says, “‘I’ll remember,’ I said. ‘I don’t need any help.’ I had started on when suddenly I said it without having any warning that I was going to: ‘No bloody moon’” (247). The phrase that Bayard remembers and utters without warning is his recollection of Aunt Jenny’s advice given to him before meeting Redmond. Aunt Jenny tells Bayard about blockade runners she knew in Charleston who “were heroes in a way, you see—not heroes because they were helping to prolong the Confederacy but heroes in the sense that David Crocket or John Sevier would have been to small boys or fool old women” (244). Aunt Jenny sees the blockade runners as heroes who are larger than life and outside of time. One particular blockade runner, an Englishman, used to repeat “no bloody moon” as a mantra. With no moon to light the night sky, the Englishman could successfully slip through Federal lines and achieve his mission without conflict or violence. The word “bloody” operates not only as an English explicative, but also as a literal indication of the blood-shed that the moon’s presence would cause.

When Bayard remembers the Englishman’s mantra, he evokes heroism and non-violence, an unusual pairing for Bayard’s family and community. Bayard’s memory of the Englishman’s phrase demonstrates his engagement of memory not as isolated and fixated but as Bergsonian duration in which his mind intuitively recalls the phrase

without warning and without premeditated analysis. Bayard's memory does not subdivide past moments from the present and allows his decisions made in the present to be intuitively connected to his memories of the past. Bayard's mode of remembering "no bloody moon" guides him away from perpetuating violence and towards a peaceful solution with Redmond.

The climactic scene between Bayard and Redmond demonstrates how the duration of time for Bayard cannot be simply delineated as past, present, and future. Bayard imagines the events that will happen in Redmond's office almost as if they have already happened and he is looking back on them. When Bayard enters Redmond's office unarmed and sees Redmond at his desk with a pistol, Bayard imagines a conversation between the two of them although neither man speaks. Bayard narrates, "It was as if we both knew what the passage of words would be" (248). Bayard's focus then shifts to the pistol and he imagines Redmond firing the gun and thinks, "I knew it would miss me though his hand did not tremble" (248). Bayard plays the scene in his mind according to how he imagines and intends the interaction to proceed and that is how the interaction unfolds in reality; Bayard's present and future conflate in the moment. As Redmond's fires the pistol and misses Bayard, Bayard's memory returns to the moment when he and Ringo killed Grumby. Bayard thinks, "Maybe I didn't even hear the explosion though I remember the sudden orange bloom and smoke as they appeared against his white shirt as they had appeared against Grumby's greasy Confederate coat" (249). As Bayard connects the showdown with Grumby to the showdown with Redmond, his present and past conflate into a single moment. As a boy, Bayard's



memory preserves him despite the violence that he commits on Grumby, and as a young man, Bayard's matured memory, fully engaged in the duration of time, provides more than just preservation; it provides a way for him to break the cycle of violence and forge the beginnings of a new Southern code of honor.

Bayard and Ringo fully engage memory and imagination when they find themselves most vulnerable, and Faulkner depicts the newly freed slaves engaging memory and imagination in a similar way. As the freed slaves journey north with no provisions and no guidance, memory motivates them to persevere. The memory that the freed slaves have is not one that belongs to them, though. For the system of slavery to endure as long as it did, slave masters took great care to deprive slaves of knowledge and therefore limited their supply of useful memories about the immediate world in which they lived. In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass recalls that one of his masters said, "A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world. Now, if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him" (2045). The masters of the freed slaves journeying northward in *The Unvanquished* prevented them from knowing what they would find once they left the plantation. Faulkner writes that they were:

seeking a delusion, a dream, a bright shape which they could not know since there was nothing in their heritage, nothing in the memory even of the old men to tell the others, 'This is what we will find'; he nor they could not have known what it was there—one of those impulses

inexplicable yet invincible which appear among races of people at intervals and drive them to pick up and leave all security and familiarity of earth and home and start out. (81)

Although the masters have deprived the slaves of concrete memories, Faulkner depicts the slaves as possessing another type of memory, a bone deep intuitive memory that cannot be explained or logically traced. The impulse that Faulkner describes as “inexplicable yet invincible” suggests that while the freed slaves do not have memories of factual information (i.e. ‘This is what we will find’), they have an intuitive memory that propels them forward despite their deprivation of any memory of solid facts.

The memory that the freed slaves access intuitively and substitute for concrete memories is that of the Israelites and their exodus out of slavery in Egypt as depicted in the Old Testament. The slaves’ reference to journey across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land clearly marks their connection to the exodus of the Israelites. The American slaves preserved the inspirational memory of the Israelites from one generation to the next through songs and story telling, and remembering the trials that lead to freedom for the Israelites allows the slaves to connect across time with a memory that serves to motivate and preserve. Faulkner depicts the connection that the freed slaves have to the Israelites when a woman traveling on her way to freedom remarks "Hit's Jordan we coming to. Jesus gonter get me that far," imagining that like the Israelites the freed slaves are approaching the river that marks the boundaries of freedom (85). The woman has no way of knowing what river the group approaches, but her memories preserved in oral culture and her connection to a past that mirrors her own preserves her

motivation to continue the journey despite having no food, no possessions, and no knowledge of the road ahead. Faulkner again depicts the slaves accessing the memory of the Israelites to preserve their journey when he writes, “They were singing, walking along the road singing, not even looking to either side” (91). Through the singing of these spirituals, the freed slaves collectively remember the trials of the Israelites in the past, and connect them to their own trials in the present. Dilsey’s act of remembrance on Easter Sunday in *The Sound and the Fury* operates in a similar way as she collectively remembers the resurrection of Christ with the other members of the church. Both Dilsey and the freed slaves find great strength for the trials of present through their acts of collective remembering the past. Remembering the past and carrying it into the present allows the hungry and homeless freed slaves to persevere on the journey looking forward, not distracted to either side. Just like the other “races of people just picking up and moving” the collective oral tradition and memory of the freed slaves preserves them and helps them to prevail.

Just as memory operates communally for the freed slaves to provide preservation during tribulation, the defeated white Southern community is preserved and eventually experiences regeneration as a result of engaging memory in its fluid Bergsonian form. After the Civil War, the white community is faced with the shame of defeat and the deterioration of the system of Southern honor. Instead of returning home as heroes, the rebels, particularly Col. Sartoris, skulk back to Jefferson as defeated and cowardly soldiers who spent as much time stealing horses as fighting Federal troops. The civilians survivors have behaved no more honorably than the soldiers. In particular, Granny, who

before the war takes every opportunity to reprimand the young Bayard and Ringo for breaking faith with the code of Southern honor, spends the war years conning the Federal generals out horses and supplies. Despite military defeat and the deterioration of the system of honor, the community of Jefferson is preserved and eventually regenerated through the act of remembering. The community must recreate a society that they feel was worth fighting for despite the abundance of dishonorable realities in which they have engaged. By believing that memory forever forestalls defeat, the community attempts to recreate, or more likely create for the first time a noble and honorable Southern tradition. The honor system evolves throughout the novel, with Bayard as the archetype, and results in the preservation of the Southern community.

The motif of horse thievery demonstrates characters attempting to preserve a code of honor through memory despite the harsh realities of wartime. During the course of the novel Bayard, his father Col. Sartoris, and Granny all become horse thieves. Because of the importance and value of horses in this society, they are the essential symbol of Southern aristocracy and dignity. Therefore stealing another Southerner's horse becomes the ultimate rejection of the code of honor in the community. In order for Bayard, his father, and his grandmother to maintain a sense of this Southern honor, they imagine that they are borrowing the horses for a time with the intent to return them. When Col. Sartoris asks Bayard where he got his horse, Bayard responds, "We borrowed it... The man wasn't there" (62). Later Granny responds to Col. Sartoris in an identical manner when questioned about a pair of horses and then forces Bayard and Ringo to walk instead of ride the horses to Jefferson because the animals are "borrowed." Remembering the

horses as “borrowed” allows the horse thieves to preserve a remnant of their Southern honor; they can behave pragmatically in their time of crisis by taking what doesn't belong to them without completely destroying their commitment to honor by imagining that their stolen property is borrowed and treating it respectfully with the intention of returning it. If Faulkner defends a Southern tradition in *The Unvanquished* it is as Douglas T. Miller describes it: "When Faulkner defends the old order he is not defending the gay world of grand balls, mint juleps, magnolia blossoms and gallant manners; rather he is praising a moral order-- a code of personal dignity, courage, and honor" (204). By remembering the code even while breaking it, the horse thieves demonstrate a desire to return to, or create for the first time, a system where honor is not just polite society manners but a guiding and unifying moral dictum.

Faulkner further presents the necessity of memory for the preservation of honor when Col. Sartoris periodically returns as a defeated soldier to the plantation during the war. To stave off the shame of defeat, Col. Sartoris frames his domestic duties as extensions of the battlefield. He cannot be defeated if the battle is still taking place, so he approaches work on his plantation as a he approaches and idealized engagement with the enemy. When he builds a new corral for his livestock with the help of Bayard and Ringo, Col. Sartoris commands the boys as if they are his troops, lops off tree limbs for the corral with his sword, and calls Jupiter, his war horse to "Trot! Canter! Charge!" (13). Col. Sartoris's actions are not bouts with post traumatic stress; they are products of a memory that must activate to preserve dignity and honor despite the reality of defeat and

shame, a problem that extends beyond Col. Sartoris and into an entire Southern population trying to maintain a sense of itself despite defeat.

The community extends grace to their dishonored soldiers who, like Col. Sartoris, engage a fluid memory of the past in order to preserve themselves. Bayard describes the impossibility of recording what happened to the soldiers during the war and explains the reaction of the community to the return of the soldiers as follows: “and what petty precisian to quibble about locations in space or in chronology, who to care or insist *Now Come, old man, tell the truth: did you see this? were you really there?* Because wars are wars” (94). The community does not need the returning soldiers to present an objective analysis of each moment of war as broken and subdivided by calendars and maps. The precision of memory is unimportant. The data and facts of the war make way for the duration of the intuited memory of the war. By remembering the soldiers in this manner, the community is able to accept rather than reject the soldiers, and by doing so they take the first step in rebuilding a defeated community.

Just as Col. Sartoris is preserved by continuing to battle even in civilian life, the community as a whole refuses defeat and is preserved through a collective memory and retelling of Civil War stories that allow them to continue fighting even after defeat. The communal act of story telling becomes the final means for preservation for the Southern community. The memories of defeat, remembered in a state of fluidity not fixity, are enshrined in the telling of stories and the transmission of memory from one generation to the next. As Drusilla recounts a battle scene to Bayard, Bayard vividly imagines the scene and then the scene is gone to him; however he immediately reflects, “Only not gone or

vanished either, so long as there should be defeated or the descendants of defeated to tell it or listen to the telling" (98). Bayard's memory of the scene is Bergsonian in nature. The memory is not entirely under Bayard's control; it is somewhat capricious as it enters and exits his immediate recollection. The moment of recollection demonstrates Bergson's theory of duration as well. Time is not tied to clocks and calendars for Bayard, who recognizes that his memory and experience will endure beyond himself and become a part of future generations and communities. By remembering the war and the defeat in this way, Southerners in *The Unvanquished* find preservation for themselves and manage to begin rebuilding a community and new code of honor. Faulkner demonstrates how a collective memory employed in times of crisis can preserve a community and ultimately improve it. Faulkner himself may be seen as an agent attempting to preserve a sense of Southern honor through the act of writing a novel that, while it does include many despicable Southerners, presents the necessity of a system of honor to preserving a functioning society.

The ambiguous title of *The Unvanquished* could refer to the topography, the youth, the railroad, the soldiers, or Southern tradition. However, with Faulkner's subtle but pervasive use of memory and imagination throughout the novel, I submit that the title refers to the undefeated memory and imagination of the Southerners who Faulkner depicts as prime examples of humans coping with personal and cultural crisis by using memory to create and make sense of their world. *The Unvanquished* presents a continuation of Faulkner's nuanced presentation of memory and imagination as

restorative and constructive and does not revise but rather extends and complicates his presentation of the same themes in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom!*.



CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSIONS

In *The Sound and the Fury*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *The Unvanquished* William Faulkner presents memory and imagination as forces that lead to restoration, regeneration, and redemption for the characters and communities that engage memory in a state of *durée* and recognize the fluidity of time in the manner proposed by Henri Bergson. Both Bergson and Faulkner recognize that modern mechanized society tends to create individuals who are bound to clock-time and who function as automatons rather than vital human beings. Just as Bergson theorizes that vitality in life comes through intuition rather than intellect, so too Faulkner presents vital characters in fiction who embrace memory of the past not as a series of precise dates and times but rather as a fluid and evolving entity. In *Creative Evolution* Bergson writes, “Intellect dislikes what is fluid, and solidifies everything it touches. We do not *think* real time. But we *live* it” (52-53). Harold B. Segel summarizes Bergson’s view: “Time, he argued, was real—hence his term *durée réelle* (real duration)—and could never be grasped by the methods of science. Only intuition—meaning, in essence, experience as memory—perceives time” (186). Faulkner presents hopeful characters like Dilsey, Shreve, and Bayard who engage the memory of the past outside of fixed clock-time finding regeneration and vitality in memory rather than becoming paralyzed by it. The relation towards memory is the

defining trait of each character in these three novels, and while Faulkner does present characters who are destroyed by their memory like Quentin Compson, who is obsessed with a single moment in the past, and Thomas Sutpen, who refuses to acknowledge the past, I argue that Faulkner presents memory as primarily constructive rather than destructive.

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner presents a wide arch of characters engaging memory. Quentin's obsession with time and his compulsive remembering of Caddy lead to his destruction, and Mrs. Compson and Jason become isolated and embittered by completely rejecting the past and refusing to remember it. Benjy's engagement of the past, present, and future in one seamless flow affords him a degree of safety, and Dilsey is Faulkner's full fledged statement of the memory's power to restore and produce vitality. Dilsey's act of remembering comes in the context of the Easter Sunday church service presided over by the Reverend Shegog. The church service itself is a performance of memory for those in attendance who commemorate the resurrection of Christ. Dilsey fluidly connects the remembrance of Christ's resurrection and the church service to her own personal history and to the past, present, and future of the Compson family. She cries, "I've seed de first en de last" acknowledging the interconnection of the beginning, the end, and of all time in her experiences in religious settings and with the Compson family (297). Dilsey's memory produces a vitality and perseverance in the pragmatic aspects of her daily life as the caregiver and moral compass for the Compson family.

Shreve is the rememberer in *Absalom, Absalom!* who most successfully makes meaning out of the past. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner depicts characters attempting to make meaning through memory out of the legend of Thomas Sutpen, and Shreve, who is farthest removed from the actual events of the legend, manages to come closest to understanding the significance of Thomas Sutpen's life and legacy. Sutpen himself refuses to confront his painful childhood memory of being rejecting at the doorstep of a wealthy plantation owner and dooms himself to repeating the past as he tries to out run it. Shreve is Faulkner's counterpoint to Sutpen. Whereas Sutpen refuses to remember the past and is ultimately undone by it, Shreve weaves the memories of the Sutpen legend into a meaningful and significant story. Shreve takes on Quentin's memories of the Sutpen legend just as Quentin takes on the memories passed to him through his father and through Rosa. Although Shreve's memories of the Sutpen legend are not firsthand, his memory and imagination lay claim to the memories of others, and they become his own. Shreve remembers the pieces of the legend that Quentin has told him, and he imagines, interprets, and adds to these memories to create the fullest projection of the legend. Shreve's memory is artistic and intuitive, and this allows him to create a meaningful version of the legend unlike others who either reject memory or approach the past as a fixed and objective entity.

In *The Unvanquished* Bayard Sartoris breaks the cycle of violence and forges a new code of honor by his engagement of memory. When Bayard goes to face his father's killer, Redmond, he goes armed with his memory rather than a weapon. George Wyatt remarks, "You walked in here without even a pocket knife and let him miss you twice.

My God in heaven” (250). As Bayard goes to meet Redmond, he remembers the violence committed by his father and his own violent murder of Grumby. As Bayard mounts the stairs to Redmond’s office, he also remembers the mantra of an old blockade-runner: “No bloody moon” (247). With no moon the blockade runner could have a successful run without conflict or violence, and in remembering this phrase, Bayard aims to manage his father’s killer without perpetrating violence. Bayard’s seamless and fluid memory of past allows him to break the cycle of violence and convince the old-guard townfolk of Jefferson that scores can be settled without bloodshed. Even George Wyatt, bent on avenging Col. Sartoris’s death, remarks, “Maybe you’re right, maybe there has been enough killing in your family” (251). Bayard’s fluid and intuitive memory of the past gives him courage that the town sees as a new model for honor in a society recovering from the defeat of the Civil War.

William Faulkner’s use of memory and imagination is most overt in the three novels discussed above, but his pervasive use of the past throughout all his oeuvre is a hallmark. Faulkner’s use of memory does not appear to evolve or change, but different facets of his complex view of memory continue to be borne out throughout his career. Upon reading a wide selection of Faulkner’s novels and short stories, readers find themselves reflecting back not just on a single work but on an entire world of interconnected characters comprised of Compsons, Sartorises, Snopeses, and McCaslins and interconnected stories of decaying families, local legends, and Civil War history. This is the world of Yoknapatawpha County, and Faulkner forces his readers to

remember this world as one fluid world of the past. To read Faulkner's world is to read and remember in *réelle durée*.

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