

5-2007

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Trauma, Myth, and History in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*

by

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Submitted to the LSU Honors College in partial fulfillment of  
the Upper Division Honors Program.

May 2007

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& Agricultural and Mechanical College  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

## Chapter 1: An Introduction to Trauma, History, and Myth

As novels concerned with history, William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971) seem to share a common impulse. Each novel approaches history in both a theoretical and a practical sense, particularly through the demonstration by their historian-narrators of historiographic methods based primarily on narrative. In considering history in a theoretical sense, both novels tend to place marked emphasis on the act of narration as the making of meaning within history. In doing so, they call attention to the constructive nature of narration, namely the ways in which narrators take available historical facts and transform them, in some cases leaving out information, and sometimes adding speculations, in order to achieve a sense of plausibility. Consequently, this method's primary emphasis is on satisfying the spirit of the narrative that organizes the available historical information. In other words, it is a focus on making a believable, understandable story from the set of available facts, a method in which the logic of the story takes precedence over the accuracy of the set of facts. In conjunction with this emphasis on narrative as making meaning, both novels, in a more practical sense, call attention to the ways in which narrative is ubiquitous within human experience. Not only is narration figured here as the root of any object's historicity—that is to say, that which grounds it within a larger system of historical reference—but it also works in a more personal sense, within self-conceptions, personal histories, and the larger systemic narratives in which characters see themselves fitting or that structure their perspectives.

Putting questions of narration aside for a moment, I would argue that it is from the basis of a *practical* and material presence of history, viewed by and large through the lens of trauma and intrusive traumatic phenomena that both novels work toward a more conceptual analysis of

history. It is considerably difficult to summarize the trauma in each novel, but I will attempt to outline it here for the sake of organization. It seems that in *Absalom, Absalom!* the Sutpen story is the basis for (or a representation of) all the trauma, past and present, in the novel. While Sutpen's violence is a good example of trauma in a classic sense (an overwhelming violence), Rosa's calling Quentin and her telling of the Sutpen story to him, as well as their trip to Sutpen's Hundred, is key to the way in which the Sutpen story begins to affect Quentin in a personal sense. Rosa's intervention sparks the shift between the Sutpen story as something submerged in Quentin's collective social consciousness (as a local legend) to something that is excavated and made explicitly real to him through his interaction with Rosa and through his and Shreve's narration. Thus it is only when the Sutpen story becomes "real" to him, when it becomes something that intrudes on his everyday thoughts, that its trauma, whose actual violent force is distant from Quentin, becomes manifest in his psyche. The presence of letters, both from Rosa and Mr Compson, and even the dust in Rosa's library, especially because of the surreal, highly sensate way that they are described, show the extent to which this dead past physically comes upon him, transporting him (to the extent that he and Shreve *become* Henry Sutpen and Bon in their narration) into a history that is not specifically his own, but yet becomes his. Thus in these dramatizations, the past in some sense attacks him, particularly the sense that the past is everywhere and unavoidable, and thus compels him into the narration that forms the bulk of the novel.

In *The Book of Daniel*, Daniel's trauma is perhaps more literal, in that his parents were arrested, jailed, and executed under great media scrutiny, while he and his sister were displaced from their home and shuffled between guardians until, after some time, the Lewins adopted them. However, it is in a similar manner to Quentin that Daniel is incited into an extensive

historical narration. The recurring presence of posters of his parents, as well as news clips and accounts from people or agencies that either love or hate his parents have overwhelmed Daniel with contradictory accounts that seem foreign to the reality of his parents as he knew them. This foreignness seems to bother Daniel, in some sense inflaming his desire to find what “really” happened to his parents, which is not unlike the motivation Quentin derives from his frustration with Rosa and his father’s accounts of the Sutpen story. Moreover, these posters, as well as other accounts of his parents, seem to trigger lapses into memory in which Daniel recalls his childhood, both with his parents and following their arrest. These recollections, bluntly juxtaposed with his recent past and snippets of his historical research (i.e. accounts of torture through history), often have a very tangible, specific language, as though Daniel were attempting to recreate as vivid a world as possible. This suggests to me that he is, in some sense, haunted by these accounts because of their contrast with his particularly vivid, material, and sensate memory.

Thus, it seems the basis for the expansive historical investigations within each novel has something to do with the intrusive aspect of these mythical histories, particularly in their material manifestations. By focusing on these historically derived traumas, I will argue that it is possible to view both novels as addressing a larger question of the relationship of history to knowledge, not only in a theoretical sense, but also in a personal and practical sense. In fact, it is precisely this intersection between personal pain and experience and the possibility of a larger epistemological concern with history that trauma theorist Cathy Caruth identifies in her introduction to *Unclaimed Experience*:

Through the notion of trauma, I will argue, we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not. (Caruth 11)

Caruth points out that trauma and history have a peculiar and complex relationship that cannot be reduced to a simple mutual exclusivity, but instead requires a sensitive analysis that identifies the different forms that history (in the sense of reference to past experience) takes. Trauma, in these terms, and quite rightly I think, is not a situation in which history disappears, but rather one in which it takes a radically different form. The question of form, then, is essential, not only in looking at trauma, but also in looking at the different forms that history takes, in both images and in literature, whether overt or suppressed. Understanding these forms (“permitting *history* to arise”) and excavating and situating them within a basic political context distinguishes these novels from what might be otherwise a negative display of only the difficulty of trauma.

The idea of form relates to Caruth’s mention of a “rethinking of reference” and illustrates the extent to which trauma represents a space in which history and historical reference are destabilized. I would argue that it is no coincidence that the linguistic and stylistic destabilization within modernist and postmodern literature often has a clear relationship to trauma, and is even sometimes concurrent with the outright mention of trauma or use of trauma as a theme, as a result of the massive and seemingly apocalyptic wars (World War I, World War II, the Cold War, and to some extent Vietnam) that destabilized notions of power, authority, and social organization. Thus, it should be no surprise that trauma is often integral within the questioning and problematization of narrative (especially linearity and totalizing narratives) in much of 20<sup>th</sup> century literature. However, the degree to which these wars have been a part of a public consciousness is due largely to the proliferation of mass media, the effects of which are particularly resonant in *The Book of Daniel*. Tangentially, it seems fitting to consider the ways in which language has changed as a result of war, just as the terms of public discourse change when war ushers in new political orders. Such shifts in language may be considered the result of

the stress of new and often traumatic experience on a language (perhaps figured as a general public discourse) whose terms have not yet adapted. Perhaps in another sense, it is within the destabilization of political organization that war often represents a point at which the usually latent ordering violence inherent within civilization becomes particularly apparent—an exposure with implications for both language and narrative as well as for the kind of historical investigations that both Quentin and Daniel undertake.

The idea that trauma is inherent within many civilizing gestures also illustrates a split in the definition of trauma. Thus, before beginning a more detailed discussion of these novels in terms of trauma, I would like to introduce a distinction between these two types of trauma. I would propose that the majority of the trauma in these novels be considered as what Greg Forter calls institutional trauma. Rather than a trauma in which there is a singular, overwhelming blow to the victim's psyche as in Caruth's model (Forter calls this a punctual trauma), an institutional trauma is instead based on a more diffuse traumatizing force, one in which the actual overwhelming violence is fragmented and distanced from the victim of trauma. Hence, punctual trauma would be more of a "war" trauma, of an overt violence, while institutional trauma is more of a sublimated trauma, in which the violence is no longer obviously apparent, but yet is still present in the deleterious political ramifications (Forter uses legitimated sexism and racism as examples) of this civilizing force. What I think qualifies both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel* as institutional traumas is the sense that the greatest impact on both Quentin and Daniel comes from the overall effect of the mythical histories they investigate; while both suffer punctual traumas (Quentin's trip to Sutpen's Hundred and encounter with Henry and Daniel's displacement from his parents and home), I would argue that the institutional traumas based in the imposing and intrusive rigidity of the mythical histories have a far greater effect. The

traumatizing rigidity within these histories has a twofold effect: it not only expresses a degree of power over Quentin and Daniel because of its apparent legitimacy and unavoidability, but it also is frustrating in that they are largely powerless to alter it. As such, institutional traumas are primarily *structural*—not in the sense of in the natural structure of being, but in the sense of being defined through their constructedness and the ways in which they structure social organization, ideology, and even behavior. Because of this they serve to structure the ways in which Quentin and Daniel see things—it is an integrated trauma. As I will discuss later in conjunction with myth, this structural rigidity affects their sense of reference in a very basic sense and is supplemented by the recapitulative phenomena that characterize both varieties of trauma.

The basic effect of trauma is unchanged, namely the pathology of recapitulative phenomena that results from trauma's ability to break down traditional notions of reference. Moreover, it may even be argued that at the core of all institutional traumas is a punctual trauma. Their commonality comes in the form of a shared force, even violence that takes on radically different forms. Often the violence of a punctual trauma will form the basis for a more institutionalized trauma, a problem that I will discuss in more detail later. For now, however, I would argue that despite a different paradigm of the actual traumatizing force, the real pathogenic effect of both forms comes from the inability to avoid the constant reliving of the trauma. In terms of an institutional trauma, this reliving is understood perhaps more as a "living" in that the trauma is located within everyday life, though the repetitive quality remains. Alternately, in terms of time, both kinds of trauma force what might ordinarily be considered past into a continual present, one that is rendered viciously circular because it cannot be grounded in either historical or experiential reference. This circularity is strikingly similar to the



effect of myth on history. In analyzing these novels, I want to investigate the extent to which these traumas, which are rooted in mythical histories (stories that have acquired the characteristics of myth), are in part caused by a mythmaking narration.

The idea that myth is itself a kind of historical narration intersects with Barthes' semiological description of myth as a type of speech, a transformative rhetoric that can be applied to any history or situation. In Barthes' conception, myth strips histories of their political basis and of their "historical intention" by removing information to produce instead "a *natural image*" (Barthes 142). It is from this natural image, which Barthes also calls a natural justification, that historical realities acquire their characteristic sense of timelessness and immutability. However, what seems especially useful in Barthes' treatment of myth is his contention that myth itself is a kind of narration, a condition that can be applied to any situation, rather than something inherent or natural within certain histories. Thus, by asserting "mythology can only have an historical foundation," Barthes opens up the possibility for a different kind of historical investigation, that is, into the peculiar traumas that affect Quentin and Daniel as motivated by a kind of mythical logic (109). In effect, it is a historical investigation that is concurrently an investigation into the origins and construction of myth and of the resultant mythical images within each novel.

It is largely through the specter of the mythical histories that both narrators' sense of reference is undermined. The issue of reference here is as important as it is broad, though to narrow it down, it may be most effective to consider it in the sense of memory and identity. The real pathology of trauma, as it functions here, is the ability of these mythical histories to slowly overwhelm the basic means by which their victims establish their position within the present, that is to say, a historically situated world. By forcibly removing the realities against which they

would refer to themselves, this kind of trauma creates an insurmountable gap in reference that results in the recapitulative phenomena commonly associated with trauma. It is a reliving based in part on an inability to ever “learn” the information that would allow the trauma to become a kind of past (allowing the trauma to become too integrated into their personal narratives) rather than a constant circular present. The degree to which both characters encounter this kind of displacement is established in part by the destabilized and non-linear narrative styles both novels. One illustration of this is both Quentin and Daniel’s struggle with the concept of “home,” which suggests the extent to which one of the principal effects of their trauma is an inability to achieve a sense of situated stability, whether temporally, ideologically, or historically.

In large part, this inability to become situated is due to the totalizing effect of the mythical metanarratives (the Sutpen story and the mythos of the Isaacsons) that, in effect, produces the traumatic phenomena that both narrators experience. Particularly important, then, is the role of myth, which provides the basis for the “master” narrative role that the mythical histories have taken on in each novel. Following Barthes’ definition, it is the vicious circularity of these mythical accounts, coupled with the tendency of myth to leave out information that would situate it within a political reality that produces the necessarily distant timelessness of myth. Time is perhaps the central factor within myth, most obviously because historical reference is primarily structured by time—at least in the most basic sense, by past and present. Philosopher and historian R.G. Collingwood has called myth a condition in which histories occur “in a dateless past [...] outside all our time-reckonings” (15). Further, he suggests that such timelessness gives mythical histories the characteristics of a world of gods, in which the insurmountable distance in time lends an eternal quality, and more importantly, implies they hold a degree of power, even dominance, because they appear to have always been, thus appear as

natural: “the human element has been completely purged away” (Collingwood 15). In Collingwood’s philosophy of history, he discusses at length the role of narration within history, suggesting that it is narrative alone that gives historical facts meaning. My approach largely follows this notion, which I think is inherently compatible with the focus on narration in both novels (which I will discuss at length later), especially in conjunction with aligning history and the relationship between literary narrative and meaning.

In doing so, this allows a consideration of trauma in different terms, which here seems to function, at least in part, as a kind of sign system, in which images stripped of their historical context haunt both Quentin and Daniel (“man-horse-demon”/“victim of Fate” Sutpen, media apparitions of hero/traitor Isaacsons). It is their desire to ground these images that leads to their investigations, in which the principal act is a re-politicizing. Their speculative narration, then, can be considered as a kind of therapeutic response to these images. In terms of the history and narration I mentioned earlier, both Quentin and Daniel seek to make meaning out of these images by providing for them contextualizing narration. While *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel* have somewhat radically different conclusions at the end of this re-politicizing process, I think that the fact that there is a distinct and arguably therapeutic movement (both in the sense of resolving the specific problem of trauma and perhaps in a more linguistic and philosophical sense, recalling Wittgenstein’s language games). Thus, it seems that both novels look to turn traumatizing mythical images, those that have become Barthes’ “parasitic form” in which “concept” reigns over historical detail, into a politically situated history, returning it from the distanced myth time into a historical time (into reality—actions and experiences within the material world). It is a kind of connection, of bridging the gap that trauma creates, by means of a

therapeutic, imaginative approach, that I would argue shows something beyond the negativity and paralysis that are commonly attributed to both modernist and postmodern literature.

These novels suggest there is something *beyond* trauma, particularly when considering the movement from *Absalom, Absalom!* to *The Book of Daniel* as a movement from Faulkner's bleakness to the distinct sense (but not confirmation) of political possibility that Doctorow offers. Not only that, but the method that both novels suggest, while perhaps seemingly esoteric because of its complexity and aesthetic experimentation, is thoroughly practical. Both Faulkner and Doctorow interrogate various forms of media, namely the oral tradition in *Absalom, Absalom!* and mass media in *The Book of Daniel*, to reveal the ways in which the mythical impulse is not only often present, but widely used as a tool for legitimating violence. It is myth that often serves as the force that sublimates the violence and traumatic force of war into the rhetoric and polish of civilization and politics. Not only that, but it also brings into the forefront the terminological basis of more sublimated, everyday institutional traumas, racism and sexism among others, that are empowered by a dichotomizing rhetoric that denies the possibility that what is "natural" is instead historically constructed. As snippets and carefully crafted media releases from politicians and figureheads have become the principal public discourse about political and social ideas, it is more important than ever to be able to dismantle such rhetoric to find its historical basis (Barthes' "historical intention"), to strive toward what Wittgenstein might call the "real" usage of language—something beyond "concept" into a usage related to a tangible reality, being able to bind rhetoric to what really matters. It is my intention to note that, in these terms, literature and history, even in the midst of a highly aesthetic or seemingly arcane pursuit, can be part of an enabling analysis—but not simply an analysis, but part of something that can be linked to a material and physical reality. It is the focus of such a material reality that I think gives these

two novels a distinct (and perhaps this is an odd conclusion) pragmatism, in that they are thoroughly in dialogue with the difficulties of language and of meaning within society and, through their constant narration and imaginative speculation, offer a means to expose the things that affect people in a practical and personal sense.

In the next chapter, I will look at the ways in which narration functions in both novels, both as the characters narrate and narrative style in each novel as a whole. I will relate narrative to the making of myth, as well as to the relationship of trauma to history.

## Chapter 2

In this chapter, I want to explore the relationship of trauma to language, in the sense that trauma represents a space in which language, as a system of reference, is destabilized. Thus, I would like to track the implications of this destabilization, both with regard to attitudes toward history within modernism and postmodernism (which, I admit, are construed somewhat loosely, but are still useful for the sake of comparison), as well as the specific implications in *Absalom*, *Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel*. In breaking down the ways in which reference and meaning normally work, trauma offers a new way for language to be challenged and problematized. Moreover, I will argue that trauma, figured in an institutional and perhaps more societal sense, can reveal the ways in which an extended engagement with history is possible even in literature that may seem to be ahistorical or anti-historical. In conjunction, I will suggest that R.G. Collingwood's historical method of imaginative speculation coincides with the relationship of history to literature, particularly within modernism and postmodernism, and offers a potentially therapeutic paradigm that works well with the particular kinds of trauma that both Quentin and Daniel suffer, as well as the methods in which they attempt to come to terms with the mythical histories that intrude upon them.

In dealing with history and trauma, which are in many ways profoundly socio-political discourses, it is easy to overlook the ways in which both history and trauma fit into more linguistic and aesthetic discourses. Both Faulkner and Doctorow, in experimenting with narrative, seem to show a desire to investigate the nature of language as it functions within the combined discourses of trauma and literature. The mythical gesture, which Barthes considers essentially linguistic and a kind of speech, provides a backdrop for Faulkner and Doctorow's increasingly explicit political concerns as they move (in many cases quite subtly) from the telling

of stories into the excavation of socio-political violence and oppression. But it is important to note that this movement toward the political begins with style and stylistic experimentation. Thus, it is through the flowing and multiple consciousnesses of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel*'s overt self-awareness, mixed media, and highly literal writing of the self that Faulkner and Doctorow illustrate a fundamental stylistic break from presumptions of language as stable and transparent system. Their use of narrative forms that break from linear and mimetic conventions problematizes the Realist assumption of a transparent, mimetic language, and thus draws more attention to language itself (especially in testing and exploring the limits of language). This break also explodes the correlated Realist assumption of the feasibility of literature having a direct moral relationship to its reader. As an example, this stylistic break seems to imply the impossibility of the notion that there can be a true "novel of ideas" in the sense of a grand, overarching, and essentially interconnected metaphysical system. These stylistic breaks, then, especially as they develop within modernism, are perhaps the beginning of the anti-essentialist, anti-totalizing feeling so prevalent within postmodern literature and theory.

Style in these terms questions not only the political nature of art but also dramatizes the powerfully (and arguably necessarily) ideological nature of language. Postmodern theorist Linda Hutcheon, responding to contemporary Marxist critiques of postmodernism as ahistorical or even anti-historical, points out that their critique stems from postmodernism's incompatibility with a strict dialectic that presumes the kind of overt historical sense that critics like Lukács have suggested as a basic moral imperative within literature. In Hutcheon's view it is not that postmodernism is an embrace of a vacuous post-Capitalist society that consists of only hollow and meaningless signs and symbols (Jameson), but that postmodernism represents the embrace of essential, unavoidable contradictions. These contradictions, at least as I see it, are in large part

because of inherent shifts in conceptions of language, especially after the destabilizing effect of the unprecedented, mechanized violence of 20<sup>th</sup> century wars. Another contributing factor is the abject failure and tragedy of Stalinism, the incredible violence of which can be read as a wildly overblown example of an enforcement of the totalizing tendency present within the Realist literature that Lukács praises. Perhaps it is somewhat unfair to identify Stalinism alone as a tipping point at which the promotion of totalized metaphysical systems within Realist literature have become logically untenable, though I would argue that theories of institutional trauma open a space in which a critique of this kind is possible. The dream of egalitarianism in these totalizing terms is fundamentally opposed to the violence necessary to enforce it. In those terms, postmodernism rejects such a totality, embracing the kind of subjectivity that Lukács would have considered morally reprobate. But in some ways, in light of the direct correlation of totalizing narratives and the violence of the Holocaust, Stalinism, and the Cold War, postmodernism's radical subjectivity is almost a necessary conclusion. However, it is important to note that this subjectivity is not a form of solipsism. Instead, it is rooted in a questioning self-awareness and a willingness to situate personal perspectives historically and socially. It is not, as Hutcheon argues repeatedly, an actual disregard for history in favor of an obsession with the self. Subjectivity in these terms, as a kind of situated self-awareness, is instead a means by which to break the holds of totalizing, institutional trauma. Thus, I would argue it creates a sense of true historical awareness, of a placement in time and within a society of myriad discourses and constructed political systems, that is perhaps a more fitting kind of "objective" reality than the Realist world Lukács envisions.

I tend to agree with Hutcheon quite often, though her critique of modernism as anti-historical seems to sidestep a few distinctions. In particular, she (in the context of a dismissive



aside) attributes to modernism the “forced amnesia of half a century” (Hutcheon Poetics 39). I find this somewhat troubling for several reasons, first because a disdain or disgust for history does not to me equate to a forced ignorance, and also because it seems that this kind of approach skims over a distinct, if peculiar involvement in history by many modernists, especially Faulkner, though also to some extent Joyce. In doing so, I think she may be setting modernism and postmodernism in too concrete an opposition and denying the possibility of a distinct trend within their conceptions of history. Both Faulkner and Joyce, in their creation of highly specific and historically grounded places within their literature, possess many of the same qualities of narrative that Hutcheon claims for postmodernism. Joyce’s “nightmare of history,” which Hutcheon cites as a characteristic example of the modernist attitude toward the past, when situated within *Ulysses*, does not seem to suggest a kind of anti-historical poetics, but instead seems to be a personal point of response (Poetics 55). While “nightmare” suggests a traumatic relationship with history, the principal movement in Joyce’s writing is a movement away from this nightmare through an extended reaction to that trauma through art. Joyce, rather than avoiding history, seeks not only to come to terms with his own past (with Stephen Dedalus figured as an exaggerated version of his younger self), but also to transform it aesthetically. While Joyce does substitute aesthetic innovation for political activism, he does not retreat entirely into art, even if his reaction is highly personalized, rather than having the kind of public discourse that “historical” writing typically demands. With both *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses* as examples, it seems that Joyce’s treatment of the past appears to line up quite closely with Hutcheon’s provision that postmodernism is a recognition of the “discursive reality” that art engages. He is arguably in discourse with his own history, which is very much a history profoundly rooted in objective realities (the objective historicity of his

account of Dublin in 1904). It is through art, and through the distance of history, that he is able to deal with a past that was, in some ways, a nightmare to him when it was his present.

Part of the difficulty of *Ulysses* is the extent to which Joyce incorporates countless allusions, not only to literature, but most emphatically to the exacting detail of Dublin in 1904. In some ways, his effort to fit the vast majority of literary history into a single day seems to prefigure postmodern subjectivity by suggesting that human history can be situated from the perspective of one highly grounded, historically situated day. In doing so, I think Joyce is not necessarily attempting to disengage from the world, but rather attempting to transform it. As part of this effort, he looks to explode conventional realist techniques, expanding his copy of the world into terms that necessarily require extensive attention—attention that constantly questions the nature of representation. Thus it seems Joyce forms a juncture between what Hutcheon identifies as realist “romans à these” (i.e. Lukács’ novels of total ideas and objective metaphysical realities) and postmodern “romans à hypothèse” (i.e. novels that primarily question and offer hypotheses instead of political or historical theses). Especially within *Ulysses*, Joyce takes mimesis to the point of breaking through almost absurdly extensive detail and unbound streams of consciousness that really do read somewhat like thoughts—that is to say, they don’t always make sense. It is this rupture of the assumptions of the mimetic novel (perhaps addressing the question of what really is “realism”) that allows the more internalized didacticism of the postmodern approach in which “readers *question* their own interpretations” rather than accept the already formed conclusions of an “ideological novel” (Hutcheon Poetics 180).

The ethical emphasis of *Ulysses* seems to be the elevation of the transformative qualities of the aesthetic in its capacity to stretch language as well as to expose the hollow victories of what Joyce considered to be petty, reductive, nationalist politics and oppressive religion and

imperialism. If the nightmare of history is akin to Joyce's personal feelings about his past, it is Leopold Bloom's humanistic vision and the novel's (and most of Joyce's literary production's) extensive focus on coming to terms with the past, in effect finding the "home" that Joyce could not inhabit until he left Ireland (also, of course, fulfilling the Odyssean homecoming), that appears to triumph in *Ulysses*, not Stephen Dedalus' traumatic nightmare. It is the ability to transform the world through an artistic imagination that is the basis of this coming to terms with the past. It is in these terms that both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel* approach the issue of trauma. It is the ability to imagine another world that offers the possibility of moving beyond the sense that the specific condition of the present world is permanent. Further, it is imagination that can then, following Collingwood's history of thought, help Quentin and Daniel to identify the contingency of their worlds, thus also providing a means to break the circularity of trauma and to explore (with vastly different results) the possibility beyond trauma.

In a similar fashion, Faulkner deals extensively with the past, an issue that he spends the vast majority of his career characterizing and revising. One element of Faulkner's interaction with the past that may emerge as routinely problematic to postmodern conceptions of history is the kind of traumatic immutability to which Faulkner ascribes Southern history. While this led Sartre to denounce Faulkner for creating a world that disallows existential freedom, his criticism belies the kind of potentially enabling analysis that Faulkner's characterization of history provides in conjunction with his narrative (and temporal) experimentation. Faulkner's exposure of the South, both in the way it functions and the way it views itself, enables an understanding of the South without necessarily providing a neat, political solution (as is often the case, far more questions than answers). While there are certainly elements of indulgence in Faulkner's tragic vision, especially in *Absalom, Absalom!*, they seem in some ways secondary to the value

inherent in locating the crux of miscegenation and incest at the core of Sutpen's failure. Though such an analysis may not have a tangible means of response to its conclusions, the simple act of systematically dismantling Southern social hierarchies through exposing their explicit political realities provides an interesting point of contrast to the inevitability and tragedy of Quentin's already-fated suicide.

What seems most positive about Faulkner's response to an otherwise immutable past is the peculiar speculative historical method that Quentin and Shreve undertake in which they are able to locate the essential "truth" at the core of the Sutpen story. The power of this method, in which a believable narrative takes precedent over concerns of fact, is perhaps overshadowed by Quentin's suicide, in that the brutal truth (the problem of miscegenation/incest) they find traumatizes Quentin far more than the Sutpen story in its mythical form. However, the method itself still offers a surprisingly effective response to the otherwise traumatizing specter of history by allowing a means to situate the story historically. In many ways, the flexibility of this historical method is an innovation that Daniel seems to largely assume. For that matter, Doctorow does as well, offering a novel in which the line between fact and fiction is particularly tenuous (i.e. how "accurate" is his appropriation of the Rosenberg story?). Yet this does not imply a method that is less valid (I would argue that it rejects the terms of the traditional opposition of valid/invalid), but instead carries a more postmodern emphasis on pointing out the extent to which even historical facts are necessarily part of a complex, discursive system.

In fact, much of the postmodern response to history follows from a lengthy historiographic tradition in which theoreticians of history have pointed out that there is often only a tenuous distinction between literary and historical writing, and in many cases, none at all. R.G. Collingwood, in his 1935 essay, *The Historical Imagination*, anatomizes the overlap of

these literary and historical discourses, drawing an explicit comparison as part of his attempt to articulate the essential task and practice of a historian:

The resemblance between the historian and the novelist [...] here reaches its culmination. Each of them makes it his business to construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. Each aims at making his picture a coherent whole, where every character in this situation is so bound up with the rest that this character in this situation cannot but act in this way, and we cannot imagine him as acting otherwise. The novel and the history must both of them make sense; nothing is admissible in either except what is necessary, and the judge of this necessity is in both cases the imagination (245-6).

By locating this juncture within the creation of a consistent and coherent world, he links the historian and novelist by their discovery and production of a specific kind of logic, namely one that necessarily produces belief and plausibility. Moreover, Collingwood's comparison of the historian and novelist raises an interesting parallel with *Absalom, Absalom!* a work nearly exactly its contemporary. It is worth noting that both Faulkner and Collingwood rely heavily on the idea of imaginative speculation as a means of accessing historical knowledge, a conclusion necessarily predicated on the centrality of narrative as a means of granting meaning.

Moreover, both Collingwood and Faulkner struggle with the notion of what constitutes "past." In his explanation of "past," Collingwood makes a distinction between scientific processes, which have a kind of temporal linearity in which the present supplants the past, and history (which he assumes is the history of thought) as a constant reliving and "re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind" (Collingwood 215).<sup>1</sup> Thus, he argues for a necessary connection in time; in history the past is not past, but instead becomes an integral part of the

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<sup>1</sup> This is in part a response to another distinction Collingwood makes about the difference in the natural and historical systems of time. Historical facts are not subject to the same schema as natural facts. While natural facts exist in a linear system of time (present always supplants the past) and can be ordered and made into a system of laws, historical facts always involve a return to the past, such that the present is a re-living of the past. Therefore instead of natural laws, the principal ordering criterion in history is narrative, an ordering of thought rather than fact.

active, subjective historical process, in which the only means of recovering any real object of historical knowledge is through *becoming*, in some sense, the historical subject (which Quentin and Shreve do quite literally in taking on Henry and Bon's identities). This positions history (here figured as narrative, distinct from the literal actions and artifacts of the past) as something that plays out and is located within the mind of the historian (as it does for Quentin and Shreve). Moreover, he argues, "the activities whose history [the historian] is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through in his own mind; they are objective, or known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own" (Collingwood 218).

In prescribing this imaginative method, Collingwood embraces a radical idealism that prefigures postmodern notions of overtly subjective histories in which the absence of consistency and even the presence of purposeful contradictions can constitute forms of historical knowledge. While *Absalom, Absalom!* suggests a need to break from reality and fact (which are limited seriously by myth) into the flexibility of imagination, Doctorow in *The Book of Daniel* has already somewhat made this break, even though at the same time through the course of the novel Daniel still has to move beyond the idea that there is a single "right" answer about what happened to his parents. It is his ability to live with the resulting contradictions, combined with his inability to accept a totalizing worldview (in that he cannot align himself with the New Left, the Old Left, or much of anything) that sets him apart from Quentin. In some ways, this inability to accept contradiction, coupled with too strict an alignment with a rigid worldview (Quentin's romanticized Old South hierarchical perspective) results in the cognitive dissonance that leads to Quentin's suicide, and in many ways, is the principal difference between the two novels (which I will discuss at length later when I compare the two novels' somewhat radically different conclusions).

The similarity in scope between Faulkner and Collingwood illustrates a shared concern, perhaps even an anxiety, about both the nature and role of historical knowledge. Collingwood's imaginative theory of history represents a divergence from what he felt to be an increasingly pervasive scientism within historical thought, doubtlessly influenced by a glut of positivism within the early 20<sup>th</sup> century British analytic philosophical scene in which he writes (clearly this was not isolated as Hutcheon concurs more than fifty years later, citing postmodernism's response to "a denigration of narrative knowledge by positivistic science" *Politics* 64). This gesture coincides somewhat with Faulkner's narrative experimentation. It is *narrative*, Collingwood argues, that is necessary to transform fragmentary objective historical knowledge into understanding. Thus, Faulkner in many ways dramatizes this need by making the principal action in *Absalom, Absalom!* the narration of a single story common to all the narrators. It is through the synthetic act of imaginative narration—a process of speculation, deduction, suspension of fact, and extended dreamlike empathetic episodes, mirroring Colleen Donnelly's description of historiography, that Quentin and Shreve are able to access the information that in effect "completes" the Sutpen story.

Donnelly characterizes *Absalom, Absalom!* as historiography in her essay "Compelled to Believe," where she suggests that at its core is not a search for truth or poetic truth, but rather a problematization of the entire enterprise of history in which the acts of open speculation and historical reconstruction are emphasized. Historiography thus emerges as a "process of seeking a means by which to comprehend experience [and] is the pervasive, essential pursuit in *Absalom, Absalom!*, which can only be accomplished by suspending all facts and data" (Donnelly 105). This act of suspension prefigures the radical subjectivities of postmodern theories of history and

in many ways the acceptance of this suspension as legitimate and believable is the clearest link between *Absalom, Absalom!* and more postmodern considerations of representation.

The article's title is taken from a phrase that Mr Compson repeats in his narration that expresses this sentiment of believability; it is as important to his rhetorical approach as it is pervasive throughout the novel. It is this *compulsion* to believe that both informs Quentin and Shreve's notion of how to proceed with their historical investigation, as well as forms the crux between theories of historiography and Faulkner's dramatization and enactment, namely the creation of a story that cannot but be believed. Not only is this proposed as a valid method, but the novel is also based around it structurally; by virtue of accompanying Quentin through all the stories, the structure of the novel arguably inculcates readers in this particular kind of reasoning. In doing so, it calls upon some of the realist conventions of transferring ideology. However, it also consistently undercuts these assumptions by creating a situation, particularly through the ending, in which the peculiar and severe nature of Quentin's tragic response should sufficiently unsettle readers and, at least in part, draw self-reflexive attention to the way in which the method of Quentin's investigation may or may not have led to his tragic reaction. Such a consideration almost inevitably leads to the troubling question of why this historical narrative must be created, much less believed.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* motivation appears in the form of intrusive traumatic phenomena, first in the form of an intrusive history, which on a primary level is Rosa's request that he visit her and accompany her to the Sutpen house, but in a more specific sense, consists of the various forces and phenomena that act on Quentin during these meetings. It is this external motivation that furthers the notion of a past that can never be past—in that it occupies a position that cannot be supplanted. This specter of the past is a principal part of the organization of Quentin's



consciousness, shown as “a barracks filled with stubborn backlooking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease” (Faulkner 7). The assumption that he *is* merely a vessel and lacks agency over these ghosts and the figure of the Civil War illustrate the extent to which the predominance of this concept of the past represents a distinct problem within *Absalom, Absalom!* and its conception of history (Quentin as a vessel will take on greater resonance when I discuss the way in which Judith Sutpen is a vessel for the ideological desire of Henry and Bon—and how this kind of objectification lies at the core of trauma in an institutional sense). This suggests that Rosa does not cause any trauma within Quentin, but she merely activates an already traumatic sense of history.

Quentin addresses the issue of why this historical investigation must take place in his first encounter with Rosa. As he sits in her library and wonders why she has called him, Quentin emerges for the first time in thought: “the two separate Quintins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage” (Faulkner 4-5). The negation here is particularly interesting, in that the beginning of Quentin’s personal narration is in this moment of “notlanguage,” where feeling and setting have created a pre-linguistic, almost primal moment (I will discuss this more in a moment). Quentin cannot necessarily articulate Rosa’s desire to tell him this story, yet in first seeing her, “the dim face looking at him with an expression speculative, urgent, and intent” he understands that this is something that he is simply *obligated* to do (Faulkner 6). This is the first hint within the novel that his relationship to history will be a traumatic one, in that he feels that he has no choice but to submit to her story. In addition, the presence of “two separate Quintins” provides an interesting link to Hutcheon’s reading of Barthes’ autobiographic “awareness of the doubleness of the self.”

And it is the representation of self in the photographs, as much as in the act of writing, that provokes this double vision. In addition, there is another split, that between the self-image and the imaged self, between

representation to the self and representation of the self, between the childhood self represented in the pictures and in memory and the adult self writing in words: “‘But I never looked like that!’ How do you know? What is the ‘you’ you might or might not look like?’ (36)” (Hutcheon *Politics* 38-9)

Quentin’s doubled self here is not only a preview of Daniel’s constant slippage between first and third person as he narrates (“the fucking family gift of self-objectification”) but also illustrates a fundamental traumatic division. The two Quentins are split between a general consciousness (self) and a role or an image that he is expected to fulfill—that of an attentive, respectful young man from a respectable family who has to humor this old woman, who might, in less generous terms, be considered somewhat crazy. It is the fulfillment of this role and attempt to conform to this image of propriety, a system to which Quentin adheres with almost slavish devotion, which provides the basis for his initial trauma through the mythical Sutpen story. Not only that, but this ideological rigidity also forms the basis for his suicide, largely because the world cannot conform to the “barracks of ghosts” that compose his romanticized Old South worldview (I will discuss both Quentin’s incitement into trauma and his ideological rigidity in more detail in the next two chapters). Despite his rigidity, in this split, he prefigures the kind of self-reflexivity that Daniel achieves, though in the parenthetical references to himself in third person within his thought, he appears to take part in the same self-objectification as Daniel, viewing himself as Quentin Compson fitting into a larger plan—an image and structure already established. Daniel’s self-consciousness and meta-cognitive approach makes explicit the conflict “between the self-image and the imaged self” (which is not as obvious or specific to Quentin), though this also factors heavily into his conflicted reaction to representations of his parents. Unlike his sister Susan, who is wholly traumatized and aligns completely with her parents, Daniel’s doubt and ability to distance himself from his own experience (which has its own set of problems) illustrates an important break between the two novels.

Quentin's impression that Rosa needs to tell him the story because she wants it heard very quickly gives way to wondering "why to him, since if she had merely wanted it told, written and even printed, she would not have needed to call in anybody," and thus a greater fascination on Quentin's part—what is it about the Sutpen story, for all practical purposes a legend, that has continued into the present (Faulkner 6)? In short, it seems to be its influence, whether as a symbol of the South's defeat or simply as a story that everyone knows about because of its mystery and supposed, likely enigmatic significance. While it is through Rosa's introduction that Thomas Sutpen first appears as "man-horse-demon," her pronouncement, despite its obvious bias, conditions the reader to see Sutpen as a formidable figure, particularly in the sense of the influence he exerts. In a basic sense, this arouses a degree of curiosity about exactly what might have produced such ire in Rosa. Though the rudimentary details of the story are almost surely saturated within a local, public consciousness, the status of the story as a kind of myth hinders any sort of easy understanding through identification, either in time or empathetically. Instead, Sutpen as a character begins as an abstraction, as both local legend and through Rosa's characterization and her tendency to render his rise and fall as an allegory for and even the partial cause of the South's defeat.

Clifford Wulfman's reading of the scene in which Rosa "calls Sutpen's voice into being" identifies this particular episode as the crucial "moment of diabolic creation," setting the tone for Sutpen through the rest of the novel. There is something both epic and tactile about Sutpen's "*Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*," in that Sutpen is clearly a figure of otherworldly proportion, though he is still very much a figure with a body. Among the first descriptions of him are words that attribute a kind of inverted divinity, and more subtly, a kind of masking: "faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard [...] Immobile, bearded and hand

palm-lifted [...] up-palm immobile and pontific” (Faulkner 4). The list of hair, clothes, and beard, can all be read as coverings, and in conjunction with the lifted palm as a gesture of ethereal creation, all contribute to distancing Sutpen from historical reality. The act of creation, too, in which “Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing,” establishes a tone of epic violence. In this overrunning, Sutpen and his captive bodies (the Haitian slaves and the French architect) are portrayed in this description as resolutely outside the normal bounds of time and the steps of construction into a surreal scene in which the creation is dragged literally out of the earth. This further reinforces the relationship between myth and nature; myth in this scene appears contingent on the epic violence of the act of creation—they drag this creation, which in this dramatization seems almost already formed, as though it were buried and contained within the land.

As the novel progresses, and by the same token, as the narrative and progressive de-mythologizing of the story occurs, Sutpen’s body and clothing become increasingly important as an indicator of the progress of his design. As I mentioned earlier, Sutpen begins as an otherworldly figure, a demon engaged in epic creation. This proves to be the most extreme expression of Sutpen as a purely mythical character. Every depiction that follows is increasingly qualified and situated, so that by the time the novel approaches the end of Sutpen’s life, he is far from mythic. Later he becomes a lean, tightly drawn, still bestial figure, particularly as he works naked in the mud with his slaves building the house, then later half-naked when he stages fights with his slaves. However, toward the end of his life, his body undergoes a rapid and particularly revealing transformation:

He was not portly yet, though he was now getting on toward fifty-five. The fat, the stomach, came later. It came upon him suddenly, all at once, in the year after whatever it was happened to his

engagement to Miss Rosa and she quitted his roof and returned to town to live alone in her father's house and did not ever speak to him again except when she addressed him that one time when they told her that he was dead. The flesh came upon him suddenly as though what the negroes and Wash Jones too called the fine figure of a man had reached and held its peak after the foundation had given away and something between the shape of him that people knew and the uncompromising skeleton of what he actually was had gone fluid and, earthbound, had been snubbed up and restrained, balloonlike unstable and lifeless, by the envelope which it had betrayed (Faulkner 63).

Particularly important in this passage is the equation of the failure of Sutpen's body, the shape of him that people knew, and the failure of his design. This failure comes after the "foundation had given way," and is perhaps a reference to both the loss of the Civil War and the loss of his "legitimate," white son and heir and the subsequent inability to begin again another family with Rosa (she leaves Sutpen's Hundred in 1866). Thus it is also important to note that the Civil War plays an integral role in the collapse of this foundation, in that the kind of mythologizing that Sutpen undertakes by trying to achieve the archetypal planter role can only be supported (at least in its overt specificity) by a social system founded on slavery. Further, the correlation between his body and his design shows again the way in which institutional trauma is concerned with physicality and form—Sutpen, while mainly a traumatizing agent, also has his own encounter with trauma. His anxiety to achieve the power and distinction of a plantation owner is rooted in the horrible outrage he felt about the incident from his childhood when he is denied entrance by a black man at the front door of the plantation (so scarring is this event, that during the section relating General Compson's narration of Sutpen telling his life story, there are at least four continuous pages of solid outrage). The racism that underpins this outrage, in which Sutpen's disgust with the idea that there is no difference between a poor white man and a black man, illustrates the fundamental role of racism in the kind of trauma that Sutpen will enact, and also,

as the example of his body shows, to which he himself is subject. As I will discuss later, it is this fundamental racism, in refusing to accept his “black” family (“how he had put his first wife aside like eleventh and twelfth century kings did: ‘I found that she was not and could never be, through no fault of her own, adjunctive or incremental to the design which I had in mind, so I provided for her and put her aside.’” p. 194), that will ultimately cause the destruction of the “legitimate” form that he does achieve. The centrality of this racism represents a fundamental and fatal contradiction: his ability to reject his first family enables Sutpen to achieve his staggering success, while its returning, suggesting it cannot be escaped, destroys this success, leaving as its only legacy the “remainder” of Jim Bond.

Similarly, as Daniel’s parents’ case achieves notoriety, they become increasingly abstracted and appropriated, illustrating the ways in which the differing political currents adopt and slant the story of the people Daniel only knows through his domestic childhood memory. Thus, while Sutpen begins as an abstraction, Daniel’s parents begin as real—a reversal that will figure significantly in my later discussion of the implications of the endings of both novels.

Particularly fascinating is the way in which Quentin and Rosa’s initial meeting establishes the paradigm of an exterior history borne out of this superhuman figure encroaching on its subjects. Rosa is shown speaking of Sutpen as the “long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration would appear, as though by outraged recapitulation evoked,” providing with remarkable concision a sense of the way in which the past functions in *Absalom, Absalom!*. This recapitulation doubles as a paradigm for both historiography and trauma; while trauma is typically defined by a constant reliving in which traumatic experience remains “unclaimed” by memory, historiography here requires a kind of intentional reliving, though it is important to note that while reliving history is a voluntary act, trauma is not. Interestingly, within *Absalom*,

*Absalom!*, there is definite slippage between the two, in many cases resulting in an unclaimable history that is not rooted in a personal traumatic experience. Here it becomes the traumatic reliving of a memory that is not Quentin's own, but one that intrudes upon him. Thus, while trauma normally involves a reliving of a personal event, Quentin is made to relive events from pasts and experiences that are not his own—thus following Collingwood's definition, he is condemned to a constant historical task.

Daniel's experience with traumatic phenomena is not entirely unlike Quentin's. While Quentin is inundated with a memory that is not his own, Daniel is similarly bombarded with his parents as images and textual apparitions. There is very little temporal stability within Daniel's narration, effectively juxtaposing his adult life with the traumas of his childhood at any moment. The consistent return to his childhood seems doubtlessly influenced by the proliferation of his parents on posters, as well as through the Foundation. His sister Susan appears to share Quentin's symptoms far more than Daniel's, at least to the extent that her parents' past represents an impassable burden to her. Daniel manages to maintain a degree of distance, though he is still victim to the trigger-like effect of images on his memory. It is in his attempt to recover a factual account of his parents that he has to engage these apparent portals of memory, thus part of his historical project is learning and exploring the cultural mythos surrounding his parents. This is again similar to Hutcheon's reading of Barthes' idea of the doubleness of the self, suggesting that there is not only a division within Daniel's view of himself, but also suggests the precise location of the problem that representations of his parents pose: an irreconcilable conflict between his memory of his parents and seeing them in imaged form.

Daniel's encounter with the traumatizing effect of his parents as myth comes through his sister Susan, particularly his acquisition of her car after her suicide attempt. This reinforces the

idea that Susan is a vehicle for a very extreme version of the trauma that results from their parents' arrest and execution (excuse the vehicle pun, it was intentional: extreme literalism and punning are a few of the ways in which Doctorow presents Daniel as ironic and detached—avoiding the crushing burden that Susan bears). He describes his inexplicable attraction to the car: “He had needed to see the car. The feeling that crept upon me was of being summoned. They’re still fucking us” (Doctorow 29). This summoning resembles Rosa’s summoning of Quentin as well as her conjuring up the image of Sutpen. In fact, the phrase “They’re still fucking us” echoes throughout the novel as one of Susan’s most resonant comments to Daniel, to the extent that it becomes a traumatic refrain. It is Susan’s Volvo that provides Daniel with the poster that becomes the first item on his list of “subjects to be taken up” at the beginning of his narration, a poster that is inextricably tied to Susan’s voice: “1. The old picture poster that I found in Susan’s Volvo, in the front seat, in a cardboard tube” (Doctorow 16). He goes so far as to repeat this incident in the fourth item of this list, “Remember it wasn’t until you got into Susan’s car that it hit you. They’re still fucking us. You get the picture. Goodbye, Daniel” (Doctorow 16). When he does confront the poster specifically at the end of the section in which he narrates the day he acquired Susan’s Volvo, he poses it in the form of an advertisement that morphs from words describing his parents as myth to describing them as he remembered them as naked bodies:

#### FIRE SALE! EVERYTHING MUST GO!

One picture poster, 36 × 24, used in demonstrations. Like new! Black and white double portrait depicts Isaacson's two faces historical curiosity cheap very cheap worthless comes in its own up-yours tube corners slightly deteriorated weighted with pieces of plaster amuse your friends with this historical curio free them. I remember his cock. Face it, if I do, I do. Always shaved without clothes. She too, shameless by design. I remember the hair around her



slit, sparse and uneven. One of the theories of aspiring modernity. Treat the body without shame.

Let the kid see it, let him learn to be natural and uninhibited (Doctorow 30).

I think this description exemplifies the essential conflict that Daniel has with his past, namely the major discrepancy of his parents as “black and white” and of “two faces” on a poster, as “used in demonstrations,” with his highly specific memory of them as they were in private, naked and eccentric. Their nakedness stands in stark contrast to Sutpen’s nakedness; not only is their nakedness sexualized by Daniel’s initial associations, and as such is also humanizing, particularly because of its specific exposure of one of the most generally private areas—the area normally subject to shame, a shame that Paul and Rochelle were making a statement against. Thus the naked body here is the potential shame of the body entirely stripped of myth, provided in detail. On the contrary, Sutpen’s nakedness was part of the essence of his mythos, as a kind of raw, bestial figure. Even further, Sutpen’s body is depicted as covered with mud and as a whole, and is never as specific, particularly because specificity implies individuality—precisely the kind of historicity that the Sutpen myth would try to remove. This historicity is precisely what first occurs to Daniel, his memory of a nakedness that implies exposure and even weakness (perhaps more accurately it is a negation: the absence of heroic or epic strength), a contrast to his parents’ position in the cultural mythology as traitors *or* heroes, because to him they are not subject to the kind of distance necessary to have the power and influence that both those roles imply.

Daniel’s description of his parents as naked is the beginning of some thirteen pages of extremely individualized recollections of his parents, as highly political, but always plagued by eccentricity and the self-marginalizing that being a Communist revolutionary in capitalist America often produces. That is, in reacting to American cultural norms and production they alienate themselves—which is in part why the image of them as naked and trying to inculcate shamelessness, against the American norm, is such a fitting initial description. In looking at the

poster and responding to an image that is clearly a “form” driven by a “concept” as Barthes describes, Daniel instinctually fills in the information that is missing from the poster, which can never adequately function as an ahistorical concept for him. Thus his response is a small-scale demythologizing in which he restores the explicit political nature of his parents.

Hutcheon suggests that the idiom of postmodern architecture is particularly effective for illuminating postmodernism’s core aspects, though here it can also be used to unite the peculiar nature of Daniel’s trauma with the type of historiography in which he engages. Because architecture is a fundamentally experiential art form, it quite literally shapes and organizes human experience and interaction on a physical level. As such, its postmodern manifestations embody the kind of historicity and subjectivity that Hutcheon cites by distorting and reordering classical forms as well as by creating forms that lack cohesion, using as an example forms denied symmetry so that instead “the eye is invited to complete the form for itself” (*Poetics* 36). She argues that this kind of “counter-expectation urges us to be active, not passive viewers,” which suggests a kind of agency within the structured, often mechanized experience of architecture. Daniel’s experience with traumatic phenomena in some ways parallels the intentional asymmetry of postmodern architecture in that he allows his writing the same kind of fragmentation. Particularly in his recollection of his childhood, his writing becomes heavily tactile, dominated by sensory words and highly specific memories of materials and images. It is the allusion to tangibility, to art and representation on a physical and material level, and this constellation of images that again connects Daniel to Quentin in their common experience with a strangely tangible, highly evocative phenomena related to their respective traumas.

Both novels’ concern with trauma on an institutional level is categorically also a concern with language, principally because (in addition to being sensory based and highly evocative) the

traumatic phenomena in both cases are textually based: the dust-mote words flying out of Rosa's mouth as well as the ubiquitous posters and media coverage of Daniel's parents. Returning again to the issue of Quentin and Daniel as doubled narrators, I would argue that it is not simply that Quentin and Daniel experience a break between a personal self and a self-in-text, but that they are oddly doubled in space. When Quentin receives the letter from his father informing him of Rosa's death, he smells the wistaria and cigar smoke, showing beyond just a brief memory that there exists a kind of separation between the barracks-of-ghosts Quentin of the South and the historian-narrator Southern apologist Quentin at Harvard. Daniel's slippage is perhaps more varied, though unlike his haphazard movement between third and first person references, there appear to be a few distinct Daniels, primarily split between childhood Daniel and writer-narrator Daniel. It is important to note that there is a physical displacement between the two characters that is more than simply a movement in time: both Quentin and Daniel are displaced from their homes. This is something I will return to again in discussing the endings of both novels, though it seems to be an important point of reference, illustrating a concurrent ideological, temporal, and literal homelessness. Whether there can be such a thing as home is a problem that haunts both texts and correlates directly with the issue of institutional traumas creating fundamental breaks in reference on the level of identity.

On a theoretical basis, these textual traumatic phenomena illustrate the recapitulative nature of the well-established enactments of racism and sexism on a social level in both their intrusion and their function as constant reminders, often on the level of identity, of a social discourse that is unjustly linguistically limited. Applied to an example like Jim Crow laws and segregation, it is the public discourse created by the signs and symbols that, to some degree, legitimates the racist gestures as part of the social institution. Signs as such are very much a part

of the traumatic apparatus, defining space on a very functional level, as well as conditioning responses long after the content of the signs has been internalized. Discourses such as these prevent any kind of true or clear valuation by both a lack of proper terminology as well as an impetus toward leaving out information, producing a perverse sense of what is “natural” behavior, restricting in the manner of Barthes’ mythological discourses. It is the act of identifying myth and its conjunction with trauma that can lead to a dismantling of the depoliticized order that myth creates.

Thus in the next chapter, I will look at how myths are made in both novels, as well as how Quentin and Daniel come to dismantle them. In an oddly proto-postmodern gesture, Quentin and Shreve’s historiography even acts as an enactment of a reader-completed form, in that they literally complete the story left incomplete by myth, but are only able to do it by involving themselves directly and subjectively in the act of narration. While Daniel is unable to complete his story with one answer, or very much at all, evident by his sense of incompleteness as his story ends in the library (to the man ushering him out of the library: “Wait—”), he seems to have achieved a sense of peace with the task of constantly having to fill in the incomplete, not with an answer, but with an understanding and acceptance of the unavoidable contradictions and gaps in language, communication, memory, and knowledge—of allowing the gaps to form meaning of their own. That is to say, looking at the dissonances and what information is *not* present can form a kind of information, just as looking at contradictions and overlaps within history can provide an illustration of competing forces, differing accounts, and express the unavoidable subjectivity and multiplicity of history. Rather than a clear and unified answer, this kind of knowledge can allow a greater insight into the way societies function, the relationships

between people, between people and ideas. It is from this understanding that Daniel is able to move beyond Quentin's despair into a more enabling, positive, political conclusion.

### Chapter 3

Architecture not only serves as a paradigm useful for thinking about history, as Hutcheon points out with her analogy of reader/viewer-completed forms, but also, in its tangibility and ordering of physical space, has particular resonance when considering institutional traumas. It is the peculiar nature of institutional traumas to be manifest in the construction of society, and in considering architecture as a point of reference, I will try to illustrate how institutional traumas have a similar kind of tangible presence in both novels. I think it is worth noting yet again that an example such as architecture reinforces the literal constructedness of institutional traumas—though they often proceed out of the chaos of more punctual traumas, they represent a structure that forcibly orders (by undermining reference) both the ideas, and in some cases, the behavior of its victims. In addition, that architecture is concurrently art and a literal *embodiment* of form constitutes an important overlap in the relationship of form to Barthes' conception of myth, particularly as it relates to the making of myth in both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel*. The role of the body, often marginalized in punctual trauma theory, has increasing relevance within institutional trauma, most notably as characters appear as hollowed forms (in the same vein of Quentin as barracks of ghosts) whose agency, even humanity, is taken over by a limited myth narrative. For example, Quentin, Judith Sutpen, and in a more oblique sense, Quentin's sister Caddy, all become vessels of a peculiar kind of ideological desire, and thus become concepts rather than political beings. Similarly, Daniel's parents become a vehicle for the political agenda of several different groups, serving as a myth filled with undetermined meaning, ready for appropriation. These examples illustrate the fundamental role of social injustices as forming the core of institutional trauma: racism and sexism in *Absalom, Absalom!* and reactionary anti-Communism in *The Book of Daniel*.

The body also provides an important link to trauma's relationship to the natural world. Within the making of myth, the physical effect on the natural world, perhaps best exemplified by Sutpen's violent relationship to the land on which he builds his plantation, offers a dramatization of trauma's tendency to appear as nature. This often coincides with the traumatic phenomena, which are often both material as well as highly textual, evidenced by the recurrence of voices (often haunting), and even the role of letters as an extension of these voices, as a principal part of these phenomena.

Before investigating the role of the body and its relationship to agency within trauma, I want to revisit the two different kinds of trauma in more detail now that I have introduced the general structure of my argument. I want to reiterate that the essential, identifying quality of trauma is that it is a space in which reference has been destabilized, usually in the most basic sense. In a literary tradition particularly marked by the explosion of consciousness after Freud and the advent of psychoanalysis, trauma has emerged within both modern and postmodern literature as an instance of an area that bridges the gap between the sometimes isolated and intellectualized domain of consciousness and the material and physical realities that are not often associated with more aestheticized literatures. It is trauma that serves a link between history as a domain of thought and history as a record of lived experience. Hutcheon mentions this split, suggesting again that the act of history is an act of writing in which we seek to grant meaning to that which we cannot understand:

"To say that the past is only known to us through textual traces is not, however, the same as saying that the past is only textual, as the semiotic idealism of some forms of poststructuralism seems to assert. This ontological reduction is not the point of postmodernism: past events existed empirically, but in epistemological terms we can only know them today through texts. Past events are given meaning, not existence, by their representation in history. [...] History's meaning lies

not in ‘what hurts’ so much as in ‘what we say once hurt’ – for we are both irremediably distanced by time and yet determined to grant meaning to that real pain of others (and ourselves).” (*Politics* 78)

Here Hutcheon, following Collingwood, implies the degree to which history is the means by which we edit and order our lived experience to produce understanding. Inherent in this conception is the assumption of a natural world, a continuation of Collingwood’s rejection of Cartesian metaphysical skepticism, an idea that has some bearing on the marked influence of spatial issues within these two novels. Trauma, as it functions in both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel*, introduces into this conception of history a definite physical concern; whether it is physical dislocation or a relationship with physical violence, trauma (both punctual and institutional) introduces the primacy of the body and its interaction with the world as a factor in determining meaning. This may seem contradictory to the more consciousness-oriented Caruthian model; however, it is the question of pain and interaction with the material world that the domain of trauma opens with its concern about reference that, as Caruth suggests, revolves around the ability, or rather inability, to connect experience with memory and lived experience. Caruth points out that *trauma* in its original Greek is understood as “an injury inflicted on a body,” only in order to counter that the late Freudian conception that she uses is instead “inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (Caruth 3). What is troubling about this conception is the extent to which trauma is implied to be entirely within the mind; I would argue that trauma’s effect on reference is located in the mind, but also that there are elements of trauma that can exist external to a victim of trauma, especially those that are embedded in social structures and ideologies. In *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel*, the physical and material nature of their respective traumas has undeniable relevance, especially as both traumas begin with literal images of myth and are supported by other texts that are part of a larger



traumatic myth apparatus. The sustained effect is not the result of a single traumatic event, but instead is a product of the repeated intrusions of this myth apparatus, often on the most basic levels, that undermines victims' ability to situate themselves.

Greg Forter characterizes the type of trauma that Caruth and her followers analyze as "punctual," insofar as they are events that overwhelm the mind and "[absent] it from direct content with the brutalizing event itself" (1). He contends that one of the principal flaws in current trauma theory is its insufficiency when applied to non-punctual traumas (Forter 3). As examples of non-punctual traumas, he cites institutional traumas, for instance "garden-variety racism," as having "decisive and deforming effects on the psyche that give rise to compulsively repeated and highly rigidified social relations [that are] so chronic and so cumulative [...] that they cannot count as "shocks" in the way that Nazi persecution and genocide do" (Forter 3). Elaborating further, he contends that these institutional traumas are naturalized versions of what were likely the punctual traumas of the initial subjugation of those subject to domination today, traumas "socially sublimated into [...] the very mechanisms by which our societies reproduce themselves [and] are in this sense caught up in the perpetuation of injuries that [...] are in the strictest sense traumas" (Forter 3). Because these traumas have been "naturalized," he suggests that it is necessary to "excavate and 'estrangle' them in order to see them *as* social traumas (Forter 3). This corresponds precisely with the action of both historian-narrators, who are themselves performing a kind of excavation, exhuming the dead remains of stories buried, both literally and by the sediment of a myth discourse that has imposed upon historical remains the characteristics of timelessness and irrevocable distance.

Forter is also concerned with the ways in which this version of institutional trauma has been suppressed, both by Freud (from whose early theories on trauma it is drawn) as well as by

those who have written about it (namely Faulkner, in this example at least), for the “possibilities for historical and political understanding [...] give rise to an acutely painful knowledge of the investigator’s implication in the structures of domination and social violence that he or she uncovers” (6). While it may be applied more appropriately to Faulkner’s tragic reading of the white Southern male’s compulsion to repetition and death rooted in the racism and sexism of the miscegenation/incest dichotomy that Quentin and Shreve uncover, it also has an uncanny bearing on Daniel, particularly at the troublesome points of sadistic sexual violence in his narrative. To some extent, it has extremely, almost exaggeratedly literal relevance, particularly in considering the pleasure Daniel derives from dominating his wife sexually, antagonizing her, including the episode when he burns her with the cigarette lighter from his sister’s car. In its placement within the novel, it shows an embrace of violence that is difficult to place immediately in the structure of the novel. It is clear, in these scenes, that Daniel has objectified Phyllis to be a kind of container for his unexplained sadistic violence. Not only in this moment, but elsewhere throughout the text, Daniel’s thoughts about his wife and his actions toward her are almost difficult to read because of their outright cruelty. This creates an interesting moment of dissonance for readers; because Daniel is the sole narrator, he creates an almost combative relationship with the reader as well, providing these moments that are in some ways repulsive, but also express a kind of instability and frustration that seems partially beyond his control. Whether this is true or not is perhaps subject to debate, but regardless, he introduces these moments of jarring violence that early in the text seem to have no substantial connection to the story he is telling. However, I think as the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Daniel’s violence toward his family (his parents, his sister, his wife and son) is rooted in a kind of frustration of reference. The break in reference that his various traumas have created has

inculcated in him a compulsive violence, and as he recovers the ability to connect with others, regaining some of the empathy that he has lost through trauma, his violence diminishes considerably, most evident in his ability to mourn at Susan's funeral, both for Susan and for his parents (asking the rabbi for a kaddish for both of them).

The notion of women as a container or vessel through which men express their ideological frustration is also explicit in *Absalom, Absalom*, particularly in Mr Compson's version of the interaction between Henry and Bon:

“because as I said before, it was not Judith who was the object of Bon's love or of Henry's solicitude. She was just the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve, not the illusion of himself nor his illusion of the other but what each conceived the other to believe him to be—the man and the youth, seduced and been seduced, victimised in turn each by the other, conqueror vanquished by his own strength, vanquished conquering by his own weakness, before Judith came into their joint lives even by so much as girlname” (Faulkner 95).

Thus here Judith becomes a site of complex male conflict, in which Henry and Bon displace their own anxieties about each other onto Judith. While this seems to contrast slightly with Quentin and Shreve's eventual conclusion that the real cause of their violence is better explained through anxieties about miscegenation, it illustrates a fundamental point that both stories share, namely the role of Judith (or perhaps even women in a more general sense) as a site on which male desire can be enacted. As I will argue later, this issue is particularly important because it represents the function of institutional trauma as based on an essential and externally recapitulative sexism in which traumatic phenomena become encoded and enacted within the very structure of society.

Daniel seems to be a vehicle for this primal instance of violence to the extent that it shows his separation from someone like Quentin—his desire to dominate is overt and shows the

degree of difference in form: rather than coming at the end of the novel, his recognition of his complicity within the structures of violence is already understood. It is a moment of complication, particularly in light of Daniel's honesty and the extent to which readers are drawn to identify with him—further, it is a moment of resistance not unlike the few instances when he directly addresses his audience. The palpable self-consciousness not only illustrates Daniel's contradictory nature, but also projects the conflict onto the reader through these disturbing displays of violence. He, unlike Quentin, is both victim and victimizer in the *active* sense (Quentin's complicity within the traumatic structure of society is to me more of a passive act). This is not to say that Daniel's violence is either entirely under his control or entirely beyond his control, but that it demonstrates an anxiety that he expresses through a kind of sadistic domination. Thus he is in some ways causing trauma as a response to the difficulty he has understanding—or as I will suggest later, his inability to empathize. Thus in an instant where he has made Phyllis into a vessel for his anxiety, he is in some ways himself a vessel of his unresolved trauma, of the displaced punctual violence of his parents' trauma. This is perhaps somewhat difficult to unpack, but it shows an example of a complex interaction between the two forms of trauma: the punctual violence that his parents suffered (as did he and Susan in a different way) has become institutionalized, manifest and recapitulative—using Daniel as a vessel by which to continue this self-replicating violence. It is Daniel's lack of reference, his inability to fully understand either himself or his family that creates the conditions by which such a trauma can take place. And it is through violence toward women that it takes place, just as other institutional traumas occur through other kinds of discriminatory injustice that are based on the same kind of projected anxiety that Henry and Bon suffered in Mr Compson's story. It seems quite evident in many accounts of racism, sexism, and even anti-Communism that the

principal motivating force is the threat that those in power feel by these groups that they neither trust nor understand. So it is through marginalization and the enactment of institutional traumas (often even through law in the most literal sense) that they can preserve the power structure that guarantees their power—much like Sutpen’s commitment to the Old South planter ideal: it is a system in which he is guaranteed the kind of power that will allow him to avenge (or right) his refusal and embarrassment at the door of the plantation as a child.

In considering the shift between Freud’s two theories of trauma (from one that is more institutional to one that is more punctual) Forter accuses Freud of absolving himself of responsibility for the “misogyny and femiphobia at the heart of his own masculinity” by making his second theory of trauma trace human misery to “a non-historical [...] cause” rather than the violence inherent within the composition and relationships of power within history that his first theory suggested. Such an anxiety about masculinity overlaps acutely with the difficulty that both Quentin and Sutpen appropriating women as objects that can satisfy the demands of their ideological masculinities, which I will illustrate later with the example of Sutpen’s empty house before his marriage. For Daniel as well, the issue of masculinity and masculine sexual assertion form a similarly problematic area, even painfully so to readers. What this illustrates, however, is that Freud’s deference to a cause that is non-historical (in the sense of innate or physiological, inborn or natural) draws attention again to the politics of form—which applies just as much to social institutions as it does to literary form, primarily because both are rooted in language. The terms in which someone speaks inevitably define the content of his or her assertion. Thus the real force behind an investigation of institutional trauma is to find the intention and conditions behind the form. This also shows why myth can play such an effective role in facilitating institutional trauma, by making histories and socially constructed systems appear to be natural

and immutable, just as Barthes concludes that “myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal” (142). This natural justification is particularly important to a reading of institutional trauma because it reinforces yet again the extent to which these kinds of traumas are rooted in an experience with the material world.

Barthes’ notion that myth provides an eternal contingency to historical actions suggests that behind myths is some kind of narrative force, both in providing the subject of myth (the historical intention), as well as providing the mythical conditioning (removing the historical intention). This notion intersects with the impulse in Faulkner criticism that locates at the heart of the trauma and tragedy a sense of history as dictated by the narrative presence of larger-than-life historical figures (Mr Compson: “victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger more heroic and the figures therefore more heroic too,” p. 71). This is particularly explicit in *Absalom, Absalom!*, especially in Sutpen’s attempt to fit the role of the Southern planter ideal. By all accounts, Sutpen’s plan for his life is clear and rigid, a design that he pursued with what Rosa characterizes as “singleminded unflagging effort and utter disregard of how his actions which the town could see might look” (Faulkner 56). This indomitable attempt to order his life, in which he applied violent force toward “acting his role,” can be rightly called a kind of narration. By those terms, he is the original “narrator” of the Sutpen story, in some sense strangely parallel with his later narrators. It is his removal of information, what Rosa terms his arrival “out of no discernible past,” that lies at the core of the traumatic effect he has on Quentin, as well as provides the rationale for his violent physical action (Faulkner 7). Sutpen’s indomitability, “who even dead did not divulge where and when he had been born,” echoes Barthes’ conception of myth as a kind of speech that involves the removal of information that orients a situation politically and in time (153).

Sutpen's self-narration, by Barthes' conception of myth, can be considered a kind of self-mythologizing. In his case, he was attempting to achieve the cultural mythos of the Old South planter, which he approached formulaically. However, his attempt to achieve this image so late within the Old South, when plantations of the stature he envisions have already been established for decades, exposes within that longer process of historical establishment the inherent violence toward people and toward the land, the degree to which he is attempting to shape the rough realities of his life into a highly restricted myth-concept. In addition to the image of Sutpen and his Haitian slaves pulling Sutpen's Hundred out of the ground, there are other images that frame Sutpen as having an antagonistic relationship to the land (Quentin: "What is it to me that the land or the earth or whatever it was got tired of him at last and turned and destroyed him?" pg. 7). However, slightly later in the novel, as Sutpen becomes slightly more humanized, he builds his house with great difficulty. One particularly revealing image is of it as empty, unfurnished, a literal form. As his "design" is gradually enacted, he is still missing an integral part: a wife:

So it was finished then, down to the last plank and brick and wooden pin which they could make themselves. Unpainted and unfurnished, without a pane of glass or a doorknob or hinge in it, twelve miles from town and almost that far from any neighbor, it stood for three years more surrounded by its formal gardens and promenades... He lived in the Spartan shell of the largest edifice in the county, not excepting the courthouse itself, whose threshold no woman had so much as seen, without any feminised softness of window pane or door or mattress; where there was not only no woman to object if he should elect to have his dogs in to sleep on the pallet bed with him.

(Faulkner 29-30)

Thus the feminine is literally a part of the form: the house is an empty shell, brutal without a feminine "civilizing" influence—even the issue of the legitimacy of the house (and the design) is based on the need for a woman to justify the house, to civilize it. This is yet another instance of an interaction between the actual form (Sutpen's empty house—a hollow form) and the need for

a woman to be at the center of this form—at the center of this oppressive design—for it to work, providing both the “softness” that would complete the house as well as the justification that a family would provide for Sutpen’s work. More importantly, having a wife represents the ultimate goal of Sutpen’s design, as well as the ultimate goal of trauma as a theoretical form, its literal *regeneration* through children.

In conjunction with the literal manifestations of trauma, echoing voices play an important role in triggering and maintaining trauma in both novels. These voices are a particularly interesting because they function as a kind of haunting that profoundly affects both Quentin and Daniel, though in markedly different ways. These haunting voices appear in conjunction with Rosa’s presentation of Sutpen in epic, demoniac form and Daniel’s encounter with the poster of his parents in Susan’s Volvo, and act as extensions of their presentations. Both the image of Sutpen and the poster of the Isaacsons profoundly affect Quentin and Daniel’s narration as a both a form of initial incitement and a reference point for their consideration of these histories (in that these images are the texts that form the beginning of their response). As such, the presence of Rosa and Susan’s voices as recurrent makes them part of the recapitulative apparatus of the respective traumas, in much the same way as the images recur through both novels. The consideration of voice opens another way in which to consider trauma, namely as also existing within a less explicitly linguistic sensory realm, displaying a form of association that is perhaps more immediate and primary than the thinking in which trauma is most often obvious (Quentin’s “notpeople in notlanguage”).

Wulfman points out the peculiar role of dust in the first scene of *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which Quentin’s vision of Rosa speaking shows dust as a physical enactment of Rosa’s telling the story:



“the motes of dust suspended in the air seem coextensive with Rosa Coldfield’s speech and the acts of recollection and transmission it embodies. [...] The strangely soporific atmosphere, at once peaceful and threatening, is the air produced by recollection: a narcotic medium of reception and transmission. The dust from which the novel rises is part of a sensory concoction composed of heat, light, and voice, suspended in a matrix of recollection from which ghosts are evoked—not by means of a blood offering, but through a compound of dust and narrative the text calls “outraged recapitulation.” (Wulfman 111-2)

Dust, as part of this “sensory concoction of heat, light, and voice” sets the tone not only for memory, as Wulfman argues, but also for history as part of an intrusive traumatic apparatus. The principal force of Wulfman’s argument is his proposition that there is a different kind of memory occurring in *Absalom, Absalom!*, which he calls mnemosis, in which characters “remember” histories that are not their own. This intrusion is very much in line with the notion of an institutional trauma; here the institutionalized aspect is the extent to which history has become a strange and menacing burden in which Rosa’s “outraged recapitulation” gives way to yet more recapitulation in the form of Quentin’s eventual response to the story. The dust itself becomes a literal, visible history that Rosa seeks to transmit to Quentin. The primacy of this scene seems evident to Quentin, particularly in reference to the discourse between the “two Quentins” that follows shortly after this scene. There is something beyond cognition here, particularly in the way that the scene seems to “bind atmosphere to articulation,” and create a more immediate environment that seems to operate on the level of sense, much like the sensory experience Quentin will have with his father’s telling of the Sutpen story (Wulfman 112).

This scene in Rosa’s library, in which history literally comes over Quentin, is informed not only by his sense-perception as a more immediate kind of logic, but one in which his perceptions are linked to Rosa’s voice:

“as though in inverse ratio to the vanishing voice, the invoked ghost of the man whom she could neither forgive nor revenge herself upon began to assume a quality almost of solidity, permanence. Itself circumambient and enclosed by its effluvium of hell, its aura of unregeneration...” (Faulkner 8).

Thus as Rosa’s voice fades, the specter of Sutpen emerges with “solidity,” as his image becomes one in which Quentin (still arguably within the terms of “notpeople in notlanguage”) enters into an environment, “circumambient” and the “effluvium of hell,” in which he is overtaken by these images. Perhaps images is incorrect, because it seems far better to describe this experience in its associative context—apprehended primarily as a feeling rather than by an ordered logic, and often in terms that would resist such a logic even to the point of potential mutual exclusivity. Moreover, later in the scene in Rosa’s library, the narrator’s description of Quentin’s perception of the scene strikes upon the temporal problem inherent within Rosa’s primal delivery of history:

“It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity—horror or pleasure or amazement—depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet elapsing time as music or a printed tale...” (Faulkner 15).

Time takes on the quality of dream, particularly that of a suspension in a world beyond not only time but words as well. This is a somewhat cryptic passage, though it appears to refer again to the division between the two Quentins, between a world of real time and a world of dreams in which this story can be enacted without concern for whether it is horrible or amazing because it lacks a reference to the real world and real time. Thus it is this degree of suspension that can make the story seem fictive and dreamlike, but also removes its impact. However, within this system of two different worlds and time, there is a distinct conflict developing. The role of parenthetical intrusions in descriptions of Quentin and his thought serves to illustrate the tenuous

divide between these two worlds, and even more importantly, the interaction between the two as the root of Quentin's problem with history. The parenthetical intrusions also serve to show a degree of thought that is not ordered, exposing its flights and wanderings—and in doing so, exposes here the back and forth nature of two worlds in conflict. Quentin's concurrent understanding and bewilderment in Rosa's library prefigures the two worlds that will be horrifyingly integrated at the end of the novel. Only when the story, which Quentin and Shreve "become," finally intersects with Quentin's real experience, especially his trip with Rosa to Sutpen's Hundred, does Quentin finally feel the true effect of the story. As the suspension is stripped away, it is as though he wakes from a dream and the impact of that dream has become real. I will return to this point in the next chapter when I discuss the implications of the endings of both novels. For now, however, I want to call attention to the recurrence of this theme of parenthetical interruption through not only *Absalom, Absalom!*, but also *The Book of Daniel*, as part of a parallel expression of the haunting voices that initiate both historical investigations (Rosa and Susan). These voices often compose the parenthetical intrusions, having integrated themselves into Quentin and Daniel's minds, whether through repetition or through the force of their impact, though likely both. It is important to note that this paradigm of a voice or a thought that intrudes and interrupts is rooted in an external reality, in part through the act of memory, but also through the presence of these interrupting voices in literal form.

As part of this traumatic refrain, letters act as a concrete representation—representing a material form of the haunting voices. Letters are a particularly interesting form as both an inherently textual as well as a concrete form of communication and address, and one in which the recipient is virtually compelled to read the contents. Even at the very beginning of the novel, it is Rosa's letter that has drawn Quentin into hearing the Sutpen story, and it is another letter

that compels him to join her on the trip to Sutpen's Hundred. In addition, Mr Compson's letters to Quentin while he is at Harvard seem to transport him back to Mississippi. There is a particular moment during the evening on which Quentin is listening to his father tell his version of the Sutpen story that provides a point of reference for the letter that he receives much later in the novel:

“below the veranda the fireflies blew and drifted in soft random—the odor, the scent, which five months later Mr Compson's letter would carry up from Mississippi and over the long iron New England snow and into Quentin's sitting-room at Harvard” (27).

I would argue this moment's connection to the letter much later in the novel indicates that there is something particularly representative about this moment, both to Quentin and to Faulkner's conception of the South. In fact, it seems to be something resembling the pure essence of the South, as well as a moment of realization. The essence of the moment is arguably located in part within the storytelling act, from father to son, the transmission of this legend, arguably trauma, of history from one generation to the next. In fact, Mr Compson's view of Sutpen in terms of fate and classical mythology seems to be a contributing factor to Quentin's perspective, and for that matter, so is Rosa's account, as he encounters the trauma of this seemingly inescapable history primarily through the *memory* (and synthesis) that his and Shreve's narration involves.

Wulfman argues that Quentin's use of memory is perhaps more like “an uncanny reception, for the memories that emerge dreamlike from Quentin's unconscious are not his own,” which Wulfman compares to Proust's famous “madeleine” anecdote (Wulfman 111-2). While Proust's experience with memory results in a positive and integrative narrative, Quentin's experience represents a greater sense of dissolution, in which memory “still has the power to produce narrative, [but] that production is urgently compelled and its reception imposes a strange burden” (Wulfman 112).

In thinking about a memory that is Quentin's own, in conjunction with my earlier mention of the primal scene in Rosa's library and the emergence of Sutpen as a demoniac, overwhelming figure, it seems that both Rosa and Quentin's father's perspectives of Sutpen seem to color Quentin's judgment despite his relative disinterest in his father's account ("meanwhile Mr Compson's voice speaking on while Quentin heard it without listening [...] Quentin hearing without having to listen," p. 101-2). What is interesting to me about these two scenes is the extent to which they are a sensory-rich experience. While it can be more or less taken for granted that Mr Compson's perspective of the Sutpen story is saturated in Quentin's memory, his disinterest coincides with the way that he seems to drift out of an immediate consciousness into a world of smell and essence, in which he is still "hearing," but in which the immediacy of sense becomes a more important text than the story. Smell is a particularly interesting sense in that it operates primarily by association, as well as on a distinctly non-verbal, immediately physical level. Moreover, smell is a sense often closely associated with specific places, and thus can be one of the most evocative of the senses, particularly as it correlates to the issue of memory. When Quentin does get the letter from his father months later, smell is again featured prominently:

"...in his father's sloped fine hand out of that dead dusty summer where he had prepared for Harvard so that his father's hand could lie on a strange lamplit table in Cambridge; that dead summer twilight—the wistaria, the cigar-smell, the fireflies—attenuated up from Mississippi and into this strange room, across this strange iron New England snow" (141).

In fact, it is not only smell, but also light that is "attenuated up from Mississippi," recalling Wulfman's reading of Rosa's chilling introduction of Sutpen's "Be Light." Tangentially, the "dead summer twilight" and the fireflies indicate an interesting relationship to light, even suggesting at this particularly representative moment (which itself was under a "dim bug-fouled

globe,” p. 101), that a diminished version of Sutpen’s “Be Light” has filtered through the scattered light sources. However, in this crucial moment, two different sensory experiences converge in an oddly essentializing way. The story is strangely integrated into the setting, which is itself recapitulated through Mr Compson’s letter. In reliving the moment from months before through the terms of this sensate experience, Quentin is reminded not as much of his father’s story, but of the South as a place, of a feeling and its essential qualities, an impression which will factor enormously into Quentin’s horror at the end of his narration. The peculiar environment of these situations factors into Quentin’s general experience with a traumatic history, as sublinguistic and sensory forces form the basis of the traumatic phenomena (a distinct, intrusive, and defining feeling) in the two scenes with Rosa and Mr Compson. What cannot be articulated, his sense of “the South” or otherwise, is often worst for Quentin. This is even evident because it is often entirely impression, rootless and traumatic, and clings to aura in the absence of a logic that can support it. Thus the “aura” of the South that is informed by these traumatic phenomena provides yet another reinforcement of the mythical versions of the stories Rosa and Mr Compson tell, but also reinforce Quentin’s mythically informed, rigid worldview. Moreover, I would argue that these traumatic phenomena exist in a form that is explicitly contrary to the kind of logic and analysis that Quentin and Shreve are able to use in their narration, both before and after they “become” Henry and Bon. These images and feelings stand in the place of an explicit analysis, preventing the kind of cognitive filling in the blanks that Quentin achieves with Shreve’s help, instead covering it with a blanket explanation. Rather than questioning and reconstructing, these phenomena simply reinforce what *is*, which in this case is a mythical history.

In *The Book of Daniel*, echoing voices play a similarly important role, particularly in creating a traumatic refrain from Susan's letter to Daniel. Daniel's relationship to Susan is fascinating in that she represents a highly traumatized voice. She in effect undergoes a punctual trauma, while Daniel's trauma is decidedly more institutional. In fact, Susan is much like Quentin at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*: suicidal, irrevocably scarred by the way in which she has so closely identified with her parents—their death, as we see at the end of the novel, is her death as well. Through her voice, which I would consider to be an angrier form of Quentin's, echoes the refrain of what she tells Daniel when he visits her at the mental institution, and which is reinforced in the letter Daniel mentions later in the novel. "They're still fucking us [...] You get the picture [...] Goodbye Daniel" recurs throughout Daniel's narration with the impact of Susan's severe trauma drawing an interesting contrast against Daniel's detachment—despite his distance, it seems as though he is always somehow affected, both in that he repeats this phrase so often, as well as its function as a trigger for memories from his childhood.

Daniel mentions his connection to Susan as something explicitly conditioned by myth, reflecting that "under one guise or another they were still the Isaacson kids [...] like figures in a myth who suffer the same fate no matter what version is told, who remain in eternal relationship no matter how their names are spelled" (63). This not only recalls the extent to which his parents have become a myth, but also more importantly, shows his necessary involvement in that myth. It is the contrast between Daniel and Susan's reactions, however, that provides the most interesting insight into the nature of the trauma.

Susan's voice echoes again later in the novel, when Daniel is meeting with Artie Sternlicht, the representative figure for the New Left, when Daniel first begins to understand Susan's sense of betrayal because the New Left no longer regarded her parents' cause as

worthwhile. This stands in contrast to the resentment that Daniel feels toward his parents. He implies that he initially understood the “they” in “they are still fucking us” as Paul and Rochelle, which is what he feels, rather than the New Left as Susan intended it. This flash of clarity, which occurs while he listens to Sternlicht ranting somewhat senselessly, represents one of the breakthroughs for Daniel, in which he is able to move beyond the kind of violence and indulgent irony that characterize his early narration (especially evident by his professed antipathy and even scorn toward his wife and son) into a greater empathetic sense. Instead of resenting Susan, here he demonstrates a renewed ability to connect to her. Such a connection allows Daniel to resolve one of the breaks between the present and his past—Susan’s perspective, especially because she is almost totally enveloped by trauma, helps him to better understand his connection to the history he is narrating. In some ways, it suggests a shift from the more skeptical view of his parents at the beginning, toward a greater propensity to defend them, a tendency that inspires the direction of his later investigations. Thus just as Quentin needs Shreve’s perspective and deduction to complete the Sutpen story, so does Daniel need to resolve this separation from his sister in order to move forward with the implied goal of his project: a coming to terms with his past.<sup>2</sup>

In the next chapter, I will explore the culmination of both Quentin and Daniel’s historical investigations, as well as the implications of their approaches to trauma and myth.

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<sup>2</sup> This has very interesting implications about history as a collective, rather than a private act—a notion that aligns nicely with figuring trauma as an isolating, solipsistic form of history, suggesting that it is through other people’s perspectives and through collective efforts that we can achieve the reference that makes history a meaningful pursuit.



## Chapter 4

If the ordering capability of architecture can be taken as a metaphor for institutional trauma, then the image of mapping may illustrate a potential qualification. In "An Impossible Resignation: Faulkner and the Colonial Imagination," Sean Latham uses a postcolonial approach to analyze the two published maps of Yoknapatawpha County and to relate them to the shifting definition of pieces of land common to several novels. Latham argues that these maps draw attention to problems of ownership and possession, and in doing so, question the nature of the relationship between people and land. The flexibility and transparency of mapping emphasizes the tenuous nature of possession, as well as the sense that there is strange conflict between the natural world and the attempt of myth to become natural ("What is it to me that the land or the earth or whatever it was got tired of him at last and turned and destroyed him?" Faulkner 8). However, what excites me most about Latham's reading are the myriad possibilities that a postcolonial reading offers to trauma studies, particularly in articulating the relationship between punctual and institutional traumas. Not only does such an approach offer a more concrete and politically oriented angle from which to approach trauma, it also offers a heightened sensitivity toward the basic definitions of civilization—a means by which the notion of possession and the apparatuses of civilization can be destabilized and questioned.

Upon the removal of a colonial presence, postcolonial societies are often faced with the task of defining a national identity from the fragments of what "native" culture exists as well as from the inevitable remainders of a colonial legacy. What usually ensues, at least in literary examples, is a synthetic effort, an attempt to make a constructive narrative out of the chaos and destruction (wars of liberation, civil wars, and power struggles among ethnic groups in the most famous examples) typically associated with the removal of a colonial presence. Often these

narratives possess a highly politicized, even allegorical relationship that parallels the constructive act of building a new country (Fredric Jameson's "national allegory"), or perhaps more loosely construed, building a sense of home. The notion of home, then, can also serve as a point from which people in a postcolonial society can begin to build a sense of reference, both in the relationship of personal identity to national identity, and in a general sense, in building a home that is of their own definition. I bring up all this because I think that this approach toward the notion of home, particularly as it relates to a larger political condition, is particularly relevant for both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel*. There seems to be a peculiar connection between places and ideology in both novels, particularly places that might be construed as home: Daniel's childhood home and Quentin's concept of "the South." These two places act as symbols for an essential ideology, something fundamental that neither character can necessarily articulate, but that profoundly affects the way they approach their historical investigations. Further, it shows an area in which the traumatic break in reference is particularly problematic.

On one hand, when taken in a more abstract sense, both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Book of Daniel* can be read as narratives of displacement—whether in time, in reference, or in a literal sense. In addition, both of these novels have an uncommon concern with the relationship between places and a more personal sense of reference, to the extent that the nature of specific places factors into the very foundation of their historical investigations and again in their conclusions. In addition, I think that the paradigmatic similarity of postcolonial literature arises again when considering the role that war plays in unsettling social orders. Foucault argues in "*Society Must Be Defended*" that war often destabilizes social structures by making an "objective" point of view (presupposing a philosophical universality) either useless or impossible. In forcing a perspective that consists of conflicting forces instead of a single unified

force, it can expose the latent violence within the ordering apparatuses of society. In some ways this corresponds with the ubiquitous violence of both conquest and liberation: there must be a certain amount of violence to achieve an initial overthrow of an institutionalized system, which often has the weight of legitimacy. And in order to establish legitimacy, an equivalent amount of violence, though in different forms, must continue. Thus Foucault's notion of an ever-present violence, equally represented in both war and politics, coincides with the notion that institutional trauma is a system in which the violence of punctual trauma has simply taken another form. This violence, in the most basic sense, can be taken as a violence toward land, as Sutpen is depicted violently pulling his plantation out of the ground, or it can take a more polished form, in the totalitarian nature of cultural myths and their appropriation, whether it be the image of Daniel's parents as traitors being used to justify Cold War paranoia, or even the eerily sanitized, reductive polish of Disneyland.

In light of these examples, I would argue that the one of the principal sustaining forces of an institutional trauma, at least in these two novels, is its role within a structure devoted to preserving an existing political or social order—often to preserving the power of a certain group at the expense of another. This corresponds with Forter's reading of Freud's later model as expressing a reactionary movement in order to preserve trauma as something that is not caused by historical intention, but is instead caused by a force that is somehow beyond our reach, integral to humanity. However, I think that what gives this particular resonance with these two novels is the role that war plays in each. In *Absalom, Absalom!* it is the Civil War as the "fever that cured the disease," and in *The Book of Daniel* it is the Cold War as a massive expression of hysteria and paranoia. These wars, particularly from Foucault's perspective, act as large social traumas, such that those in power or groups with power interests often respond with institutional

traumas that preserve power, particularly racism, sexism, anti-Communism, or any other tactic to force a warlike situation to take advantage of anxieties about groups of people onto whom these fears can be projected. Daniel explains a similar phenomenon when investigating the political culture that surrounded his parents' arrest:

Many historians have noted an interesting phenomenon in American life in the years immediately after a war. In the councils of government fierce partisanship replaces the necessary political coalitions of war time. In the greater arena of social relations—business, labor, the community—violence rises, fear and recrimination dominate public discussion, passion prevails over reason. Many historians have noted this phenomenon. It is attributed to the continuance beyond the end of the war of the war hysteria. Unfortunately, the necessary emotional fever for fighting a war cannot be turned off like a water faucet. Enemies must continue to be found. The mind and heart cannot be demobilized as quickly as the platoon. On the contrary, like a fiery furnace at white heat, it takes a considerable time to cool (Doctorow 23).

The paradigm Daniel suggests is not much different from the kind of racially motivated anxiety that followed the Civil War, and especially following the perceived political threat of Reconstruction, and the entrenchment of racial codes across the South. The resultant Jim Crow laws, along with segregation as a whole, are a particularly resonant example of an institutional trauma concurrent with *Absalom, Absalom!* and the early action of *The Book of Daniel*, both paradigmatically and topically. Within segregation the force of institutional trauma works most obviously through textual means, both signs and symbols (“white only,” “colored,” and symbols like the Confederate flag). Signs suggest both physical boundaries and a dichotomized racial condition, while concurrently enforcing a kind of internal policing. Such internalization is particularly traumatic because it destabilizes identity by removing or contradicting any internal sense with an oppressive image already formed.

One example from another Faulkner novel that seems useful in looking at effect of institutional trauma on identity is Joe Christmas' racial identity in *Light in August*. Faulkner dramatizes the degree to which the socially constructed nature of race is traumatic by showing Joe Christmas in a position in which he cannot determine the "truth" about his racial background because his grandfather, Doc Hines, violently removed the information by killing Joe's parents. This creates what Laura Doyle ("The Body Against Itself in Faulkner's Phenomenology of Race") calls a "chiasm" at the most fundamental level of Joe's identity, a situation in which there arises an impassable gap in his identity that is mirrored by the "slippage" in the climactic moments of violence in the novel (for example, we cannot know exactly what happened to Joanna Burden because the text jumps directly from the failure of the gun to Joe outside naked. This serves as enactment of myth on the level of identity that is also shared by the readers, we cannot *know* what Joe has done, but only assume. Our reference as readers has been undermined, resulting in an often uncomfortable position, especially when making judgments about characters. Joe Christmas is oddly similar, in that readers may feel sympathetic toward him, even while he is violent and hostile. However, he has no opportunity to move beyond this displaced violence into any kind of resolution and understanding as does Daniel. Joe never has the chance to come to terms with his identity because of the need to fit within the white or black binary of a racially dichotomized society. Of course, this displaced anxiety leads to yet another ambiguous scene in which he has killed someone, possibly in self-defense, but which becomes a case of outrage and murder—an easy conclusion in a place where lynching and mob rule justice (which themselves express a racial and sexual anxiety, much like Joe's violence toward women and conflicted attitude toward sex) are virtual inevitabilities for a perceived "black" on white crime. His lynching and castration express a strangely sexualized racial anxiety, recalling the

recurring current of needing to preserve a sense of “masculinity” that runs through so much of both trauma theory and trauma itself. The kind of racial anxiety that Joe’s murderers express is often concurrent with a greater anxiety predicated on a fear of change. I will argue later, that part of this fear of change is potentially rooted in an inability to imagine other worlds, thus creating a false dichotomy between order (the preservation of which is a justification for racism) and chaos. This sense of chaos also factors into Quentin’s despair later, partly because it constitutes the impassable opposite pole of his highly rigidified notion of society.

Quentin’s impression of the South, gathered from his exposure to scenes with both Rosa and his father that have a function similar to the early description of Quentin’s feeling of observing “notpeople in notlanguage,” forms an oddly sub-linguistic definition, rooted in association and feeling rather than a formal logic. In doing so, it forms the kind of specific sensate place that I mentioned in the last chapter, which to Quentin, seems bound to a very specific idea, or perhaps better, a very specific *ideology* of the South. Further, the mythos of the South in a general sense seems to be something which Quentin has internalized, such that his early status as a “barracks of ghosts” is more passively, than actively traumatizing. However, as he and Shreve gradually “become” Henry and Bon, several interesting things happen. Narrating in the dreamlike state into which he and Shreve enter, in which they sometimes narrate and converse by thought alone, is a state of suspension in which they literally enter into myth and into its temporal conditions.<sup>3</sup> In order to enter into myth time, they suspend their consideration of fact and of their present condition, in effect disembodiment themselves to assume the identities of Henry and Bon. This recalls the scene in Rosa’s library in which Quentin thinks about the quality of a dream being contingent on a recognition of time elapsing; in Quentin and Shreve’s

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<sup>3</sup> For an extended reading of the two different systems of time within *Absalom, Absalom!* see Patricia Tobin’s “The Time of Myth and History in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *American Literature*, 45(1973): 252-269. Tobin’s reading of the two systems of time (historical and mythic) has influenced my reading considerably.

narration, time is suspended, and precisely because of this suspension, they are able to break the circularity and timelessness of myth by placing the full force of their subjectivities into exploring the historical intention behind the most problematic part of the Sutpen story: Henry's motivation for killing Bon.

Their conclusion that Henry's motivation was either a fear of miscegenation or incest, and which they ultimately decide is miscegenation, is incredibly revealing. Not only is this something that fills in one of the elusive gaps in the Sutpen story, but also represents their ultimate finding—that is to say, by the time their investigation has reached this point, so much depends on this one motivation that it takes on an even greater significance. What this illustrates, as the literal “core” of the Sutpen myth, is the racism and sexism on which Sutpen's design is based and upon which the entire social structure that Sutpen was attempting to copy is also based. Moreover, it is Henry's murder of Bon that I would argue definitively marks the beginning of the dramatic fall of the Sutpen family, though in many ways it is merely the precipitate of a far greater formula for destruction whose true catalyst was the Civil War, which in many ways determined the extent of the destruction to follow. Regardless, that Henry would choose to see Bon marrying Judith as miscegenation is a recapitulation of Sutpen's rejection of Bon and his mother because they were black and not “incremental” to his design. As such, it illustrates the very nature of institutional trauma in creating a compulsory repetition through the enforcement of an essentially racist dichotomy (the reductive logic of trauma)—that it would be worse to know that his sister was marrying (or what this really boils down to, is having sex with) a black man than to violate what anthropologists have called the universal taboo of incest. This corresponds to Quentin's willingness in the *The Sound and the Fury* to lie to his father, claiming he and his sister had committed incest. As such, it represents a frantic attempt to take the

“blame” for his sister’s “impurity”—forming the conclusion that either he can take the blame through incest or kill himself, but not that he can accept that she has been promiscuous. Even further, as a reminder of the raced nature of Quentin’s worldview, he equates her promiscuity with the behavior of black women, illustrating perhaps the same conflict that Henry and Bon confront in *Absalom, Absalom!* (“*Why wont you bring him to the house, Caddy? Why must you do like nigger women do in the pasture the ditches the dark woods hot hidden furious in the dark woods.*” pg. 92). Thus Caddy’s promiscuity in Quentin’s mind is tantamount to the miscegenation that Henry fears, and in expressing incestuous desire for Caddy, he seeks to avoid what he sees as the greater aberration.

Quentin, Henry, and Sutpen’s dealings with sexuality involve nearly no mention of sexual acts, but rather, are almost entirely involved with sexuality as a kind of apparatus or idea. In the same way that Quentin cannot bear the *idea* that his sister has lost her virginity and is somewhat promiscuous, so also does Sutpen want an heir, a white male son to fit a certain *category*. Both have little to no concern for the sexual act itself, but rather, the implications of such an act, particularly within the systems of truth on which they place heavy emphasis. Following Foucault, this is precisely because sexuality is that which produces the “truth of sex,” which is what Quentin, Henry, and Sutpen all desire (Foucault 68).

After the Civil War ends slavery, the basis by which Sutpen is able to sustain his enormous plantation, Sutpen is never able to recover economically, nor is he able to reestablish the “legitimate” white family that he desired. The essential problem is the racism at the core of Sutpen’s design—while he needs the social structure (slaves) that racism provides in order to achieve the planter lifestyle, he is also unable to escape the rejection of his first family. It is Bon that causes the initial conflict between Sutpen and Henry. It is also clear that Sutpen’s design is



suited only for a society in which slavery exists. However, when taken in more ideological terms, even Henry's presuppositions about women (upon finding out about Bon's relationship with the woman in New Orleans) already have a somewhat problematic and transparently racist foundation:

“a young man grown up and living in a milieu where the other sex is separated into three sharp divisions, separated (two of them) by a chasm which could be crossed but one time and in but one direction—ladies, women, females—the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the courtesans to whom they went while on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom that first caste rested...” (Faulkner 87).

“Living in a milieu” where sex is defined so rigidly indicates the presence of institutional trauma, particularly in the way in which women are necessarily categorized in one of two forms, the classic virgin-whore dichotomy. It is important to note that not only does such a system objectify women, it also creates a difficult situation for Henry—on one hand it will provide the basis for the paranoia that leads him to murder Bon, but it also has restricted the conditions of his mind, such that the inability to deal with a possible divergence from this schema results in the Bon's violent murder and culminates in Henry's eventual return “to die.” That this racism converges with extensive sexism in nearly every application is no coincidence. This factors significantly into Quentin's relationship to Henry and to the logic behind both Henry's decision and Sutpen's design. Quentin, who Faulkner introduced in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) seven years before *Absalom, Absalom!*, has a distinctly romanticized way of viewing the South, or perhaps how the South *should* be—particularly as he mourns the losses of the South in a distinctly despairing manner, capped by his eventual suicide because he cannot deal with the fact that his sister Caddy has been promiscuous and is pregnant. It is from this perspective that Quentin's response at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* makes the most sense.

After Quentin and Shreve have narrated the Sutpen story, Quentin tells Shreve about the trip he took with Rosa to Sutpen's Hundred and describes his encounter with Henry Sutpen. The placement of this scene is key, because it comes at the end of the narration in which Quentin and Shreve have already become Henry and Bon and have completed the story—though Henry's presence at Sutpen's Hundred represents an interesting point of qualification. Of course, Quentin has known his encounter with Henry the whole time he and Shreve are narrating, though it has not been significant in determining the information that their narrative required. However, now that they have completed the story, recovering it from myth, Quentin's interaction with Henry takes on an entirely different context. Now that Quentin and Shreve have applied a "therapeutic" approach to the traumatic mythical history, they are left with a history that is no longer mythical, but part of Quentin's history. I would argue that in looking at his interaction with Henry for the first time under a non-mythical guise, Quentin retains his connection with Henry, particularly because of the degree of investment that both he and Shreve made into their "becoming" Henry and Bon. It is through this dual lens of a *real* history and of Quentin's connection to Henry that I think the horror of Henry's conclusion that he returned home "to die" creates in Quentin a sense of tragedy in which he is fated to share. In becoming Henry, it is not entirely clear whether Henry's conclusion of miscegenation or incest was necessarily a product of Quentin and Shreve's deduction, or perhaps a device of Quentin's projection; however in aligning himself with Henry, then finding Henry having fated himself to die at Sutpen's Hundred, at the ruined site of the failed design, he also aligns himself with Henry's condemnation. It is quite clear that Henry cannot escape the trauma of his father's design. Quentin has no immediate reaction following the telling of this story, but when Shreve asks him why he hates the South, Quentin seems to have the moment of horrible recognition that did not

seem to set in entirely in his recognition of Henry. I would argue he realizes that the mythos of the South, in many ways embodied through the Sutpen story, is both real and brutal. He cannot, as he did earlier, treat it as though it were a dream; instead it has become a different kind of knowledge. Not only has Quentin's worldview been exposed as complicit in the violence and sexism and racism of Sutpen's design, but his romanticized view of the Old South as an ideal with a palatably rigid social order has been irrevocably lost. I would argue that this has also compromised his ability to see things in the kind of suspended dream-state in which he received the stories earlier; but instead they now have a sense of painful reality and resonance.

While Daniel's description of his various homes is often highly specific, none seems quite as important as the home he shared with his parents. In much the same way that his first encounter with the poster produces a memory of his parents naked and a lengthy reflection on their eccentricity and marginality, so also does his description of this house share in the task of situating his parents within a thoroughly ordinary setting. While they have no shortage of peculiarities, especially those related to their leftist politics, Daniel remembers them living in a small and unremarkable house. This ordinary memory, however, becomes one of the sites of interrogation during Daniel's quest to find out what really happened before his parents' arrest. He first attempts to discover any telling oddities, clues, or gaps that might explain his parents' seemingly inexplicable involvement in high level spying. For example, he questions his father's radio repair shop (particularly his father's lack of success), wondering if it could be a cover for any kind of pro-Soviet operation, however, he cannot get past his memory of his father as an unsuccessful and uninspired businessman, more concerned with ideas than with making a living. It is Daniel's memory of these places that forms the nexus for his investigation, partly because it is the only firsthand evidence he has—all the rest is mediated through generally unreliable

sources, at least once, sometimes twice or more. Even this firsthand evidence is distanced and fragmented by time.

About midway through the novel, Daniel introduces a section called “A TOUR OF THE CITY” in which he lists several (quite ordinary) locations and narrates his activities at each. In some ways this is not entirely significant in itself; however, I think it forms a motif for his action throughout the novel. Whether it is a literal or an ideological touring, Daniel’s investigation is often not only structured around the exploration of different narratives about his parents, but is also focused on the places in which he encounters these narratives. In fact, this particular section ends with “*Avenue B*” and Daniel interacting with Artie Sternlicht, the vulgar and violent New Left leader who factors importantly into Susan’s “they’re still fucking us” refrain. Later in the novel, when Daniel visits different people, he makes headings that include both the name and the address of each person. While this may be an overly zealous reading, this attachment of people to place rather than to a title or an explanation of their relationship to Daniel is part of Daniel’s attachment of ideologies and narratives to places. Even from the beginning of the novel, he is in a specific place, the browsing room, writing and “looking too late for a thesis.” This search for a thesis, as I mentioned earlier, structures the rest of Daniel’s investigation, a structure that conforms to this attention to place. However, it is Daniel’s trip to Disneyworld to find Mindish that brings into focus this concern with place as a concern with ideology and a concern with form—Daniel’s analysis of the forced form of Disneyland represents the ultimate conclusion in Daniel’s struggle with finding a political form, a form for his writing.

The amount of attention that both novels give to setting and the specificity of places not only implies a relationship between place and ideology, but is part of their interaction with myth. Between the novels, the conditions of myth have changed somewhat; while it is still a removal of

information in order to produce a naturalizing effect, in *Absalom, Absalom!* it represents not only the Sutpen story, but the essence of the South (rise, fall, and “glory”) as a process devoid of historical intention. This lack of historical intention transforms the kind of power that Sutpen and the Old South represent into a naturalized form, as though it were an immutable law of the universe. This mythical order gradually breaks down as Quentin and Shreve discover the historical intentions, often violent, and the grit and specificity that are smoothed out of myth. It is this overt specificity that humanizes, removing the distance that myth produces in bringing to the forefront the crude realities common to all people. The shift in *The Book of Daniel* is primarily that these specificities are part of Daniel’s basic assumptions. As for his portrayal of himself, he is without a doubt vulgar and brutish, and almost always highly specific with his descriptions and memories, even beginning the novel with a description of the brand and style of pen that he is assumedly using to write. His use of such specificity in his memory, as I have mentioned before, seems to be part of an attempt to counter the mythologizing impulses that he encounters throughout the novel. Myth in *The Book of Daniel* is used not only by political forces (the government that arrests and executes his parents, the Old Left, the New Left) but also by the media—it is not only a tool used to legitimize power, but part of the increasing presence of artificiality and mediation, particularly through the idiom of advertising and consumer goods. Perhaps these myriad mythologies are an inevitable part of a society in which “image” has taken over as the principal currency of public discourse, and if this is the case, then Daniel’s trip to Disneyland is an ultimate expression of his engagement with myth.

Daniel’s trip to California in the desperate hope of finding Mindish leads him to a final confrontation in Disneyland. As I mentioned before, Daniel has invested nearly all the force of his investigation in this last ditch effort to find out what *really* happened to his parents. Evidence

points to Mindish as their accuser, and in part because Daniel has never liked him, this idea sticks. When Daniel arrives at Disneyland it is clear that the book is approaching its ending. The pace changes significantly from the frantic pace of the investigation leading up to his desperate decision to fly to California, to a strangely subdued and surreal meditative tone as Daniel analyzes Disneyland, a world of incarnated symbols of imagination. I would argue that his analysis forms a compilation of his interaction with cultural myths throughout the novel. Moreover, this analysis is perhaps one of the keys to the novel, putting into a single, literal place the essence of the reduction and distortion within the cultural mythologies that have been the basis for the more institutional elements of Daniel's trauma.

Daniel's concern with the specificity of places throughout the novel takes an interesting turn at Disneyland, where Daniel observes the degree to which Disneyland is based on a necessary suspension of historical situation, to block out the machinery that forms the basis for the polished scenes:

Two problems arise in the customer's efforts to fulfill Disneyland's expectations of him. The first is that for some reason while the machinery of the rides is impressively real—that is to say, technologically perfect and historically accurate—the simulated plant and animal and geological surroundings are unreal. When you take the jungle river cruise the plants and animals on the banks betray their plastic being and electronic motivation. (Doctorow 286).

Here the *concept* of imagination, the myth of imagination, is made manifest through Disneyland's scenes and activities. It seems enormously important that it is in the "natural" scenes that the artificiality is most evident. This provides an interesting parallel to the contentious relationship that Sutpen has with the land, and his inability to make his plantation natural. Despite that, his story has filtered through time as a myth, though when pressed historically through imagination, as Quentin and Shreve do, they expose its artificiality.

Daniel goes further to analyze Disneyland's place within cultural discourses, particularly literature and the peculiar anthropology of cartoons as an expression of the totalitarian, mythologizing spirit that Daniel diagnoses Disneyland as having. Daniel asserts, "It is possible to interpret the Disney organization's relentless program of adaptation of literature, myth, and legend, as an attempt to escape these dark and rowdy conclusions of the genre" (Doctorow 287). The genre to which he is referring is the cartoons of the thirties and forties, of which he lists a brief "theology," expressing the surprising brutality and morbidity that cartoons smooth over with their presupposition of humor and artificiality. He takes this further when analyzing the appropriations of literature, calling the boat ride based on Twain's *Life on the Mississippi* a "radical process of reduction [...] with regard to historical reality," that not only reduces the literature, but smooths over the issue of slave-trade. Twain, who he figures as the "intermediary between us and this actual historical experience [...] is now no more than the name of the boat" (Doctorow 288). Thus a historical reality, once filtered by literature, then filtered by Disneyland, results in a "moving diorama of all the scenes and situations of the pirate movies made by Hollywood in the thirties and forties" (Doctorow 288). Through this kind of analysis, Daniel is problematizing directly the degree to which history is removed at a place like Disneyland. His final conclusion is a connection to consumer goods, which he asserts will "complete the Pavlovian process of symbolic transference, calling the "ideal Disneyland patron" as "one who responds to a process of symbolic manipulation that offers him his culminating sentiment at the moment of a purchase" (Doctorow 289). This further establishes Daniel's contentious relationship with cultural myths and the cultural myth-making processes (one of which is consumer-good based capitalism) with which he has struggled the whole novel. This expression of the essential conflict, the sale of pre-packaged concepts and essences of history, the sale of

myth, sets up this atmosphere of profuse myth that provides the surreal setting in which he confronts Mindish.

Mindish is now “incredibly old” and senile. Daniel persists in talking to him, while noting, as usual, the specificity of his body: “arms bare ... lips flap against each other ... whites of his eyes were discolored ... eyes were sunken ... lips made the sound of a faucet dripping ... like a turtle’s head” (Doctorow 291-2). Though he is clearly ravaged by age, Daniel introduces himself nonetheless, and surprisingly, Mindish recognizes him. In a moment of recognition that is incredibly moving to Mindish and his family (“I was sickened to see water well from the congested yellow corners of his eyes. Tears tracked down his face. [Linda] had begun to cry.”), Mindish responds to “Denny” (Doctorow 293). Then to exacerbate Daniel’s frustration, perhaps why he describes it in excruciating detail, Mindish “found the back of my neck and pulled me forward and leaned toward me and touched the top of my head with his palsied lips (Doctorow 293).

Following this moment of recognition, Daniel breaks from Disneyland with a discussion about organ rejection, namely hearts. It is clear that Daniel’s heart has been broken, in that he now knows there is no way to recover what really happened, and in doing so, he shifts focus to the three endings of the book, which represent a realignment with his family, who he has resented for so long. In failing to find the information, Daniel is forced into a connection with his family, no longer having any reason not to distance himself from them (no historical reason to solidify an account in stark contrast with his memory), and also feeling a degree of connection to them, having his heart broken in the way that Susan had. Then he narrates his parents’ execution, which is the only significant part of the “history” he has not covered. This continues the somewhat somber mood, though it represents a necessary deflation from the violence and



often sardonic detachment that define Daniel's early narration. I would even argue that in facing the details of his parents' incredibly violent execution by electrocution, he makes the final connection, having shed his own violence. Thus he also completes the movement earlier in the novel in which he begins a reconnection with Susan after meeting with Sternlicht. From that basis, not only does he break out of the trauma that has plagued him through the novel—a violence based in a denial, or perhaps displacement, of reference, but he also moves to the final stages of mourning his parents. While Daniel might deny it, his response to his parents through the book matches the common stages of grief. First shock and denial, which Susan obliquely accuses him of, then volatility and anger, which seems to characterize the majority of his action through the novel, then sadness and grief (disorganization and despair), and finally reorganization.

Daniel then ends the novel with a section called "THREE ENDINGS" in which he proposes three enumerated endings, the first of which is "1. THE HOUSE," where he returns to his childhood home, the basis for his memories of his parents, only to find another family living there. He even considers asking the woman living there if he can go in and look at it, perhaps a final concession to his need to reconnect with the truth of the past, though he concludes, "I will do nothing. It's their house now" (Doctorow 299). This also serves as a possible break or revisioning of Daniel's attachment of ideology to place—in that he has made peace with the change in definition (a new family in his house). In accepting the transience of the concept of home, he can conclude that there is no essential fact to recover about his parents and there is no essential home to recover either, and from this conclusion, he can build a home in the present—one with *his* family, his wife and son.

This leads directly to the next ending, “2. THE FUNERAL,” in which Daniel narrates what is ostensibly one funeral, but is in fact the funerals of his sister and parents merged, beginning with his parents and seamlessly transforming into Susan’s funeral in the present tense. He explains that Susan has died of “a failure of analysis,” strongly echoing the kind of cognitive dissonance that leads to Quentin’s presupposed suicide (Doctorow 301). It is again clear that Susan and her parents died together, whether they died at different times or not. However, what is most moving about this scene is Daniel’s offering a Kaddish (Jewish prayer commonly used for mourning) for not just Susan, but also for his parents, as a final gesture of sincerity, a breakthrough for Daniel. Not only that, but in this moment he experiences a reconnection with his wife and son: “I hold my wife’s hand. And I think I am going to be able to cry” (Doctorow 302). Thus even in these two endings, Daniel shakes off the last sense of denial (the final inexplicable visit to his childhood home) and moves to a sense of grief that he has never allowed himself—and in doing so, allows himself an emotional connection to his wife that he has never allowed himself either (having treated her almost exclusively as an objectified sex object through the book).

The final ending, “3. THE LIBRARY” is where *The Book of Daniel* and *Absalom, Absalom!* differ most. Quentin cannot move beyond the worldview-crushing implications of his sister’s promiscuity, but Daniel can move beyond his parents’ death. As Daniel is writing in the library, in the same place the book began, he is told to evacuate the library. While he protests “Wait—” the man who interrupts him counters: “No wait, man, the time is now. The water’s shut off. The lights are going out. Close the book. What’s the matter with you, don’t you know you’re liberated?” (Doctorow 302). Daniel realizes the inevitability of the situation and it seems to converge in a moment of realization, evident in his reaction: “I have to smile. It has not been

unexpected. I will walk out to the Sundial and see what's going down" (Doctorow 302). This ending is just as crucial as the other three, in part because it represents yet another break from Daniel's fixation on the past. He cannot even be a "historian" anymore, but must leave the library and see what sort of action, assumedly student protests, is happening. In doing so, he leaves, albeit with hesitation (also common to the other two endings), to what I imagine would be a sense of action, a life in the present tense, rather than a life fixated on "searching, too late, for a thesis" (Doctorow 7).

## Conclusion

The difficulty and pain of trauma reiterates the importance of being able to use imagination—the ability to see another world—to situate the world in which we live in relation to the many different worlds in which other people live and have lived. These two novels represent two very different approaches to a similar problem. While Daniel's "synthesis" of different perspectives and Quentin and Shreve's synthesis of different stories lead to different kinds of conclusion, namely one in which Daniel reconnects with the family dynamic on which his elusive memory is based, while Quentin after the experience of becoming Henry now has a memory that is layered by both his experience *and* his experience as Henry. Thus Quentin has only magnified the condition in which he began ("barracks filled with [...] ghosts") that ultimately results in a radical and horrible revisioning of his trip to Sutpen's Hundred and his encounter with Henry. In light of his discoveries, Quentin seems to fall victim to a more punctual trauma. In achieving a degree of resolution with the Sutpen story, his original historical and institutional trauma reveals at its core a more punctual trauma, both Sutpen's violence and

the problem of incest and miscegenation. The force this trauma, however, does not appear to strike Quentin until he connects his experience with Henry with his concept of the South (and the ideology within) in the final scene of the novel. Daniel, however, begins his narration with a punctual trauma (his parents' arrest and execution), from which he does not recover until the end of the novel. Within this punctual trauma, however, are several other institutional forces peripheral to the punctual trauma—anti-Communism leading up to their arrest, the appropriation of their image for activist purposes, the possible withholding of information by the government in order to make an example of the Isaacsons, the list goes on. In combating the institutional traumas, which are often rooted in the ubiquitous myth-making processes of a postmodern capitalist society inundated with advertising images and consumer goods, Daniel finds that there is no singular, recoverable truth that all these myth-making processes are simply occluding, but that such a search is inevitably rooted in frustration. This frustration is best exemplified in his meeting with Mindish, in which he confronts Mindish's senility—the ultimate expression of a past that cannot be recovered, not even by memory. All that Mindish can recover is a flash of recognition, which is in some sense what Daniel reverts to at the end of the novel—recognizing his parents, his sister, and his wife and son, rather than resenting or objectifying them. In the same way that Mindish's violent bearing diminishes into a sentimental, senile, childlike man, so does Daniel's return again to the time before trauma, and in mourning, this return allows his violence to give way to the peace of being able to put his parents and his sister's pain behind him without resentment.

Both novels express a historical method that works toward demythologizing the stories that both Quentin and Daniel do not understand. Quentin is able to demythologize the Sutpen myth with which he begins his narration, resulting in a confrontation between his own mythically

based ideology and the de-mythologized history that he has recovered. Daniel begins, instead, with a reality—that of an ordinary life with his parents, then must confront their relentless appropriation for various cultural myths, and in combating this mythologizing, he attempts to recover the original political situation, the reality that he already knew, but which is dissolving under the weight distortion. In failing to find the “facts” behind his parents’ arrest, he is able to connect first with his sister (through his dislike of Sternlicht and by beginning to understand what Susan meant), then later with his parents and his wife and son. In doing so, he ceases to mythologize himself, the self-consciously “cool” Daniel presented at the beginning, or the bearded radical Daniel on his trip to California, and instead returns to the relationships that compose any real sense of reference he can have. Facts are often irrecoverable and meaningless, but relationships and action have real impact. This is an extension of the basic paradigm that Barthes suggests for myth: in order to demythologize, both Quentin and Daniel must re-politicize—they must put the humanity back into myth. Focusing on relationships with people is perhaps the clearest way to do this.

In such an exploration, however, the painful reality behind myth also arises, which in these two novels is rooted in anxiety, whether about power, race, or sex. Part of what makes these two novels exciting is the extent to which the ability to imagine translates into the ability to transcend the limits of trauma, the recapitulative confinement of a lack of reference, into an enabling analysis. This has certain practical implications, which I would argue offer a sound defense against accusations of modern and postmodern literature as being either decadent or suffering from ethical paralysis. In fact, the kind of politically enabled conclusion that Daniel seems to have (“don’t you know you’re liberated?”) even seems to be a subtle suggestion to readers to interrogate the role of myth and power in the world that surrounds them. Certainly

Doctorow would agree. In a later online article critical of President George W. Bush (“The Unfeeling President,” [easthamptonstar.com](http://easthamptonstar.com)), Doctorow suggests that Presidents act as “the artificer of our national soul.” Through this he asserts that politics inevitably have effects on the way people see themselves, on the terms in which we conduct our lives and even thoughts. Thus when politics are traumatic and based on fundamental injustices, the vast majority of people, even those indirectly related, suffer as a result. The endless suffering of the white male in Faulkner provides room for an interesting point of response, which I cannot resist phrasing as “it’s the slavery, stupid.” Moreover, the effect of rigid ideologies inevitably trickles through all of society. If Sutpen’s adherence to design is an indication of a “cultural ideal,” then it was an enactment of a “South” that never was—and trying to do so, especially so late in the history of the antebellum South, necessarily situates it in an unnatural and violent context. The task of mythmaking on that scale required ruthlessness or it would not have worked. But even then, Sutpen’s original motivation, the trauma of being refused at the door by a black man and his equation of black with his embarrassment, was rooted in a fundamental racism. Thus the punctual trauma that Sutpen suffers, the punctual trauma he causes, as well as the institutional traumas he enacts through his enforcement of racism, are all rooted in this original, understood racism—an institutional trauma in its own right. However, this racism is not an ultimate answer, but only offers a paradigm by which these kinds of social traumas function. For example, Sutpen’s racism is in many ways a displacement of his considerable resentment about his family’s social status as cattle. Thus racism, sexism, and even class discrimination all express a similar kind of trauma. While this seems to add to the terminological murkiness of “trauma,” this similar paradigm is perhaps an expression of a social and institutional trauma in its most general sense—as a limiting force attempting to define people in terms that are too narrow.

Perhaps Faulkner's notion of a tragic white male compulsion to death can be reread as something that *needed* to die, and from the end of that world can come the beginning of a new world. And though this new world may be messy and seem dismal compared to a myth-based reality, it is in truth no better or worse or all that different than the ones before—but hopefully can be one in which the fundamental traumas and the anxieties about power can dissolve into a greater understanding. The first step, it seems, is in dismantling the myths and the traumatic structures that make these injustices possible on a large scale. And one way to do it is through the tools of literature, of interrogating and investigating the role of language as well as the power of imagination—the ability not only to see, but understand a world that is not your own.

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