Intrusion versus Knowledge:
Two Theories of History
in Literature

An Honors Thesis
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Novelists William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren write about a present that is inextricably tied to a rich Southern heritage. Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom and The Sound and the Fury deal primarily with two families, the Sutpens and the Compsons, who struggle for survival in the changing South during and after the War Between the States. Young Quentin Compson, a central figure in both novels, finds the struggle between the Old South, ruled by family pride and honor, and the New, shattered, no longer governed by tradition, overwhelming; he destroys himself in a kind of allegiance to his version of the old world and its values. Jack Burden, the narrator of Warren's All the King's Men, must also face an historical choice—to accept or reject a personal, tainted Southern heritage that is thrust upon him in adulthood. Unlike Quentin, the young Jack Burden feels that history is dead and can have no effect on his life. When he is confronted with historical facts that do indeed change his life Jack accepts his new-found heritage and his role in the ever-changing course of history.

Neither Quentin nor Jack can escape his confrontation
with the past. Quentin, "his very body...an empty hall
echoing with sonorous defeated names..." has grown up in
an atmosphere steeped in Southern tradition. Ironically,
Jack, who as a college student pushed the past aside, forces
his own showdown with history when he becomes political
hatchet-man for powerful southern governor Willie Stark.
His "dirt-digging" leads to a startling revelation about his
own history.

In the novels cited, Faulkner and Warren emphasize the
ties which bind past to present. The novelists differ, how-
ever, on the way history affects their contemporary settings.
Faulkner takes a circular view of history, portraying the
past as a stultifying force from which man can learn little
to help him face the future and the changes it will bring.
Warren presents a spiral theory of history, treating the
past as a learning device from which man can learn about him-
self, his relation to others and his role in the future.
This paper will examine and contrast the two views of his-
tory represented in the novels, primarily focusing on
Faulkner's Quentin Compson and Warren's Jack Burden.

Absalom, Absalom is the legend of a single man, southern
plantation owner Thomas Sutpen, as told by three narrators.
Each narrator represents a different generation—a woman who
knew Sutpen personally, a man whose father befriended Sutpen
and two college boys (considered one narrator) far enough
removed from Sutpen's life to indeed regard his story as a
legend; each narrator tells the story according to his own
biases. The stories overlap, build on one another, contradict one another until the reader finds it nearly impossible to sift the facts of the legend from the conjectures of its chroniclers. The aura of ambiguity Faulkner creates suggests that man interprets and explains history according to his own experience: when man looks at the past for knowledge he merely reaffirms his own beliefs. A past-present circular pattern seems inevitable.

In spite of the confusion surrounding Sutpen's life, a basic story does emerge from the accounts of the narrators. At the age of ten Sutpen, son of a poor West Virginia mountaineer who had recently moved to Virginia, was turned from the front door of a wealthy man's home by a Negro servant. The boy decided to revenge this humiliation by acquiring "land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with." (p. 240) At fourteen he went to the West Indies, where he became wealthy and married. When their son was born Sutpen discovered that his wife was part-Negro; he left her (providing for her financially) and returned to the United States.

Sutpen then built Sutpen's Hundred outside Jefferson, Mississippi, and married Ellen Coldfield, who bore Henry and Judith. When Henry went to college he met Charles Bon, who later became engaged to Judith. Civil war postponed their marriage, and sometime during the war Henry killed Bon at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred. Sutpen returned from the war with his wife and his daughter's fiance dead, Henry disappeared, and his plantation in ruin.
After Sutpen's death in 1869, Charles Etienne, Bon's son by an octooreen mistress, went to live at Sutpen's Hundred. He married a full-blooded black, and they produced an idiot son, Jim Bond. Sutpen's Hundred burned in 1910, killing Clytie, Sutpen's daughter by a black slave. Jim Bond disappeared.

The Sutpen legend revolves around a conjecture made by Quentin that is apparently accepted as truth by most Faulkner critics: that Bon was Sutpen's son by his first marriage. Quentin claims to have received this information from Henry in 1910 at Sutpen's Hundred, where Henry had been hiding for many years. This fact would make the idiot Jim Bond Sutpen's great-grandson and the only heir to Sutpen's design after the mansion burns in 1910. If true, the irony in this story is obvious: the trace of black blood that Sutpen considered incompatible to his design is embodied in his only descendant, an idiot Negro incapable of understanding his heritage. Sutpen himself could not learn from his own past; he was a victim of what critic John Hagan calls "arrested development." As Hagan explains, Sutpen's moral and intellectual growth stopped the day he was rejected from the rich man's door. That day he dedicated himself to fulfillment of a plan of revenge, the great "design" he describes to Quentin's grandfather many years later. People became mere pawns, devoid of human identity and emotion, in his scheme. The man who as a child was outraged by the social and racial humiliation of rejection rejects his first wife on the same bases,
apparently confident that the property settlement will satisfy her human dignity.\textsuperscript{3}

The immorality of Sutpen's actions never occurs to him; even as he watches his plan crumble he tells General Compson, "You see, I had a design in my mind. Whether it was a good or bad design is beside the point; the question is, where did I make the mistake in it,..." (p. 263). As Hagan points out, Sutpen is incapable of understanding the past, because he sees it through eyes essentially unchanged since his tenth year.

The man's bias is at least partially responsible for the circular pattern followed by the events of his life. Although we cannot know the exact circumstances, we can assume from the narrator's stories that Sutpen never recognizes Bon as his son. He refusal to accept Bon allows the Bon-Judith situation to occur and forces Henry to kill his half-brother and go into hiding. With Henry gone Sutpen has no male heir, so, with the same rigid, mechanical thinking that led him to reject his first wife and son, Sutpen propositions Rosa Coldfield, promising marriage if a son is born. When
Rosa leaves Sutpen's Hundred in rage, Sutpen impregnates Milly Jones, the grand-daughter of Wash Jones, a poor white who lives in a shack on Sutpen property, and who, in the prosperous days before the war, was not allowed to enter the front door of the mansion. Jones kills Sutpen when he perceives the latter's total lack of feeling for his grand-daughter. Ironically, Sutpen is killed by a poor white who has felt the sting of rejection just as Sutpen had so many years ago. There is an important difference, however, between Sutpen's design and Jones's defiant act: Jones acts from a sense of moral outrage, striking out at what he considers evil. Morality played no part in the creation of the design; Sutpen merely vowed to revenge the wrong to which he had been subjected. He is unprepared for any attack on a moral basis; his lack of morality in a very real sense destroys him.

Charles Stierne's presence at Sutpen's Hundred closes the circle, as the boy "emerges as both the young and incredulous Sutpen turned away from the door of the Virginia plantation and the part-Negro Bon turned away from Sutpen's Hundred." Charles's defiance at the discovery of his black blood echoes Sutpen's childhood reaction, but, ironically, Charles repudiates the white and accepts the black by marrying a full-blood Negro. Their idiot son is all that survives from the grand Sutpen design.

Of the narrators only Quentin knows all the "facts" of the Sutpen legend; Rosa Coldfield and Quentin's father explain what they don't know by conjecture about what must have hap-
pened. Even Quentin, with the whole story in front of him, realizes that simple facts don't explain the past; he and Shreve create perhaps the most imaginative of the three stories from what they know. While the need of all the narrators to go beyond the basic story for truth indicates that facts alone cannot explain the past, the distortions present in each of the versions shows that no one can see beyond his own preconceptions to truly understand history.

Faulkner establishes a strong feeling of past-in-present in the first paragraph of the novel. On a "still hot dead weary September afternoon" (p. 7) in 1910 Rosa Coldfield sits in a stuffy, hot room she calls the office "because her father called it that" (p. 7) and tells Quentin her version of the Sutpen legend. The old lady is wearing the "eternal black she has worn for forty-three years..." (p. 7), and the story she tells Quentin has lived and grown in her mind for at least that long.

Rosa's Sutpen is a demon who burst upon Jefferson from nowhere, dragging behind him a wagonload of "wild niggers" and a French architect commissioned to build a mansion. The ogre-figure she creates spirits her sister Ellen away and "without gentleness" (p. 9) begets two "doomed" children, Henry and Judith. She dwells on two incidents which reinforce her opinion of Sutpen: a Sunday morning when he brings his family to church in a carriage driven a breakneck speed, and a fighting incident involving Sutpen and his Negroes. The first event Rosa witnessed; the second she imagines. In both
she paints her sister and the two children as victims of Sutpen's cruelty. She tells Quentin how Allen became "almost a recluse, watching those two doomed children growing up whom she was helpless to save." (p. 10)

The reader may initially assume that Rosa's personal acquaintance with Sutpen would make her first-hand knowledge more reliable than that of Mr. Compson or Quentin; however, her unfolding of the past proves this assumption false. Like Sutpen, Rosa is unable to understand or clearly interpret her own past because of the arrested development of her character; life ended for Rosa the day of Sutpen's proposition. To fully appreciate the devastating effect Sutpen's crude suggestion had on the twenty-year-old Rosa, we need to examine her life up to that point. By her own admission she was born too late, 27 years later than her sister and four years later than her niece Judith. Her childhood was almost nonexistent; until her nineteenth year she was literally trapped in her home taking care of her tyrannical Puritan father. As Quentin listens to her Sutpen story on that hot September afternoon his mind wanders to a vivid image of the child Rosa that eloquently describes the pathetic loneliness of the cloistered child:

Quentin seemed to watch resolving the figure
of a little girl...of the dead time. She
seemed to stand, to lurk, behind the neat picket
fence of a small, grimly middle-class yard
or lawn, looking out upon whatever ogre-world
of that quiet village street with that air of
children born too late into their parent's lives
and doomed to contemplate all human behavior
through the complex and needless follies of adults...
(p. 22)
The image of lurking behind a picket fence summarizes well 
Rosa's existence as the ill-timed child bereft of a life 
of her own.

To fill the void of her own existence Rosa turned to 
living vicariously through those around her. In Mr. Compson's 
version of the Sutpen story we learn that Rosa offered to 
teach Judith, then engaged to Charles Bon, to keep house, 
and that she secretly made things for her niece's trousseau, 
"projecting upon Judith all the abortive dreams and delusions 
of her own doomed and frustrated youth." (p. 70) In Compson's 
words, she prepared for "her own vicarious bridal" (p. 77) 
to a man (Bon) she had not and would never see alive.

The war years turned Rosa's world upside down: her father, 
Allen, and Bon died, Henry disappeared, and Rosa, who had 
become a pauper, moved to Sutpen's Hundred to live with 
Judith. Prior to this time the plantation had been little 
more than a story to her; her father's disapproval of Sutpen 
prevented her from going there over a few times a year.
The vast changes in her life made the move seem logical and 
proper, just as they caused Rosa to accept the marriage 
proposal of her sister's widower, the man she had regarded 
as an ogre during her first twenty years of life. Sutpen's 
proposal represented Rosa's first and only opportunity to 
have a life of her own; his suggestion that they produce a 
child before marrying destroyed that opportunity. Outraged 
and ashamed she returned to her father's home in Jefferson, 
to which she summoned Quentin Compson (aged twenty) many 
years later.
It is from this viewpoint, a mixture of frustration, crushed romanticism and shame, that Rosa tells her story of Sutpen. In reality she wasn't even born when Sutpen came to Jefferson and married Ellen; her picture of Ellen as a recluse is contradicted by Compson's description of the woman as a social butterfly. Rosa herself admits that she hardly knew Henry and Judith as children. Thus her version of the Sutpen legend is controlled by her hatred for Sutpen and frustration at the life she never had. As Hagan points out, memory for Rosa "is mindless compulsiveness" that has obsessed her for over 40 years.

Critics usually consider Mr. Compson's version of the legend to be the "public version," as it emphasizes Sutpen's interaction with the citizens of Jefferson and the town's opinion of him. The past-in-present feeling is established at the beginning of Compson's story as it was in Rosa's case, but this time Faulkner uses a public image, that of ancient bells ringing in the ancient steeple of Jefferson's church, rather than the personal picture of Rosa sitting in her long-dead father's "office." Compson is a generation removed from Sutpen himself; his information comes from his father. He begins his story at a logical beginning--Sutpen's first appearance in Jefferson. According to Compson, Sutpen was well known in the town before he brought the "wild niggers" and the architect in to build Sutpen's Hundred; that Rosa chose to begin her story with this sensational event is in keeping with the almost super-
natural tone she keeps in her story. Unlike Rosa, who focuses almost entirely on the demon who burst upon Jefferson without warning, Compson describes the reaction of the townspeople at their first glimpse of Sutpen. Repeatedly he refers to the "the town" as "learning that..." or "feeling that..."; he seems to consciously take the objective view of the legend.

Yet Compson creates as much of his legend as Rosa does; he was not born when Sutpen arrived in Jefferson. In his attempt to explain the past Compson surrounds the Sutpen story with drama, as illustrated by his description of Sutpen's acquisition of Sutpen's Hundred:

> It was the Chickaway Indian agent with or through whom he dealt and so it was not until he took the County Recorder that Saturday night with the deed, patent, to the land and the gold Spanish coin, that the town learned that he now owned a hundred square miles of some of the best virgin bottom land in the country...(p. 34)

It is impossible to determine whether the details of Sutpen's acquisition are true, but the dramatic scene that Compson creates here is continued throughout his entire story. As Richard B. Sewall says in The Vision of Tragedy,

Mr. Compson, who has heard the story from his father, the General, moves as best he can through its intricacies, sees the heroic side of Sutpen, sees his ambition (the "design") as rooted in his boyish sense of injustice and hence "innocence," and, a fatalist himself, tells the story with a fatalist's detachment.7

That Compson tends to endow Sutpen with thoughts and feelings that fit the picture he has created him is evident in a brief aside about Clytie: "I have always liked to believe that
he intended to name Clytie, Cassandra, prompted by some
dramatic economy not only to begot but to designate the
presaging augur of his own disaster..." (p. 62) He credits
Sutpen with a great deal more insight than the story of
his life would support. A few sentences later he comments
on the ogre-filled story that Rosa told Quentin, describing
Sutpen as "a mask in a Greek tragedy, interchangeable not
only from scene to scene but from actor to actor..." (p. 62)
His statement points out how little Rosa actually knew
about Sutpen, but it also illustrates the dramatic frame
in which Compson tells his story. Later in his discourse
Compson describes the Sutpons as

...people too as we are, and victims too as we are,
but victims of a different circumstance, simpler...
and therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and in-
volved but distinct, uncomplicated who had the gift of
loving once or dying once instead of being diffused
and scattered creatures drawn blindly limb from limb
from a grab bag and assembled... (p. 89)

Thus, in a somewhat confused statement about the complex
present versus the simple past, Compson shows that his stu-
died detachment from the story he is telling causes him to
interpret the past in over-dramatized yet oversimplified
terms—as a play with a cast of characters, complete with
motives and carefully planned actions. Just as Rosa's close-
ness to the Sutpen legend causes her to distort its meaning,
Compson's detachment bars him from understanding the com-
plexities of the all-too-human past.

There is one element in the Sutpen legend that neither
Rosa nor Compson can explain to Quentin: why did Henry
kill Bon in the very presence of Judith at the gates of Sutpen's Hundred? Rosa's driving need to answer that question leads her to summon Quentin on that September afternoon to accompany her to the old house, where she feels the answer to the riddle must be hidden. She is not satisfied with her own explanation, that Sutpen forbade the marriage for no reason. Yet when she does find the truth (if we assume that Henry tells her of Bon's black heritage) she does not immediately reveal Henry's presence at Sutpen's Hundred, perhaps, as Shreve suggests at the end of the novel, "because she knew what was going to happen when she told it, took any steps, that it would be over then, finished, and that hating is like drink or drugs and she had used it so long that she did not dare risk cutting off the supply..." (p. 374) The truth partially exonerates the demon Rosa has created; she is reluctant at first to modify her own version of the past.

Compson's dramatic tendencies come into full play in his discussion of the Bon-Henry-Judith situation. Bon emerges as the world-weary sophisticate who receives the "hero-worship" of provincial, clownlike Henry (p. 96). Based on the fact that Bon and Judith hardly knew one another at the time of their engagement, Compson concludes that it was truly Henry who "seduced" his sister Judith, encouraging her to accept Bon as a marriage prospect before she even met him. He provides Henry with a two-fold motive for pushing the relationship—Henry's adoration for Bon and, more im-
portantly, his incestuous desire for his sister. "In fact," Compson says, "perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become,..." (p. 95) According to Compson, Henry killed Bon because his "fierce provincial's pride" (p. 96) could not accept Bon's relationship with an octoroon mistress and child. Yet, although he carefully dramatizes Henry's motives, Compson realizes that his version of the story "just does not explain" (p. 100) Henry's violent action. He concludes that people are not supposed to fully understand the past, that the figures he sets against the "turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs" (p. 101) is the best explanation that man can create. His fatalistic attitude seems to say that man can learn nothing from the past; Fate, rather than man's will, determines his future.

It is upon Quentin that the fathered facts, speculations, biases and hatreds of the Sutpen legend fall. He alone (even Shreve cannot know as much about the South as Quentin does) has all the facts at the time he is creating his story, but he realizes that his facts aren't enough to explain the past; he and Shreve know everything "except what is most important to know...the feelings that can make the facts credible." His almost obsessive search for truth produces a version just as biased as Rosa's hate-
driven and Compson's detached stories. For Quentin creates in Henry a character obsessed with the values with which Quentin himself is wrestling and will die for just six months after telling his version of Sutpen's story.

Ironically, though Quentin is farther removed in time from the Sutpen legend than either Rosa or Compson, his intense involvement with the past is as unavoidable as theirs. Faulkner describes him as "still too young to deserve to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one... since he was born and bred in the deep South..." (p. 9) in the opening pages of the novel. His meeting with Rosa is hardly casual; she summons him because, as grandson of the Compson who befriended Sutpen, Quentin is "partly responsible through heredity for what happened to her and her family..." (p. 13) The old woman forces him to accompany her to Sutpen's Hundred, thus bringing Quentin face-to-face "with a flesh and blood ghost... proof that the past is 'real.'" Quentin is likewise a captive audience for his father's long narrative.

Three months after the long September afternoon and evening, Quentin attempts to unravel the riddle of history for Canadian Shreve McCann and himself. He is at Harvard now, but physical distance from the South does not lessen his need to interpret its history. To fully appreciate the implications of Quentin's version of the Sutpen legend we need to first examine Quentin's suicide six months later and the events that lead up to it, as chronicled in
Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*.

Like *Absalom, Absalom*, *The Sound and the Fury* tells a single story from several different points of view. In the latter novel, however, each story is a separate entity; the interaction between narrators that characterizes *Absalom, Absalom* is absent here. Each narrative centers on Quentin's sister Caddy, the emotional center of the Compson family. Accounts of Caddy's promiscuity and marriage to provide a name for her unborn child are presented by Caddy's three brothers, Quentin, Benjy and Jason, and by Dilsey, a long-time Negro servant of the family. Each brother's conception of Caddy's behavior is different and has a unique effect on his own. In this paper, however, we will be concerned only with Caddy's effect on Quentin.

Quentin's narrative opens on the last day of his life, as he carefully makes preparations to die. Throughout this section of the novel Faulkner employs a stream of consciousness method, juxtaposing the events of Quentin's last day in Cambridge with the tortuous scenes of the past that haunt him throughout his last hours on earth. Quentin relives, again and again, the moments when Caddy told him that she was sick and finally, unable to satisfy his questions, that she was pregnant and in need of a husband. Quentin cannot accept Caddy's sexuality; he desperately wants Caddy to say that she didn't enjoy her relations: "did you love them Caddy did you love them..."12 Caddy for Quentin represents the center of the family, and, enlarging
the concept, the tradition of family honor that is integral to the Southern tradition. Her "downfall" is the downfall of Quentin's ideals—ideals that cannot withstand reality. "It's nature is hurting you not Caddy..." (p. 143), Quentin's father tells him with deadly accuracy. For it is his own human weakness as well as Caddy's that eventually destroys Quentin.

Quentin hates Caddy's suitors; he wants to, but cannot, kill the men with whom Caddy has been intimate. His reaction is partly anger at Caddy's behavior, partly jealousy because of his own incestuous desires. In flashback, we see Quentin trying to convince Caddy that they should tell their father that they had committed incest so that they can disappear together to save face for the family. Quentin becomes caught up in his scheme, and his frenzied words illustrate the reality of the incest in his mind.

...you thought it was them but it was me listen I fooled you all the time it was me you thought I was in the house where that damn honeysuckle trying not to think the smell the scent the secret surges the breathing locked drinking the wild breath the yes Yes Yes yes... (p. 185)

The sensual imagery exposes Quentin's normal sexual desires, but the boy will not accept them; he wants to take Caddy away "amid the pointing and the horror the clean flame" (p. 185) to a final purification. Only their deaths, Quentin feels, can erase their imperfections. But he cannot kill his sister.
Quentin's ambivalent attachment to Caddy, his hatred for her lover, is his own need "to believe in some sustaining ideal struggling against the horror of the reality" continue once he goes to Harvard. He cannot accept reality, neither can he defend his ideals or fulfill his dreams by taking Caddy, killing her or killing her lovers. Critic Melvin Backman suggests that Quentin sees himself as the "innocent child killed by the world," because he cannot live and love "unfettered by sexuality." Quentin takes to Harvard not only his feeling of impotence and perhaps martyrdom, but also a complex story of the past (the Sutpen legend) and memories of his shocking confrontation with Henry. His story of Sutpen becomes entangled in his own problems, and his version of the legend emerges as biased as that of Rosa or Mr. Compson.

The immediate cause for Quentin's long story is the news, from his father, of Miss Rosa's death, although it is not the first time that he has been asked, "Tell me about the South. What is it like there?" (p. 174) He (and Shreve, once the Canadian gets caught up in the narrative) reverse the order of usual story-telling, placing the effect before the cause by describing the end of Sutpen's life, Judith's existence afterward and Charles Stienne's roles in the end of Sutpen's design first. One critic has suggested that "the actual reconstruction of the Sutpen legend must have preceded their present colloquy." The events no longer
shock them, he points out; now they must unlock the meaning of the bare story they have constructed.

It is in this section that we learn of Sutpen's design, as passed down from Grandfather Compson to Quentin's father to Quentin. Somewhere along the line of telling the failure of the design has been blamed on Sutpen's "innocence." Whether or not Quentin is the first to call Sutpen innocent in unclear; what is important is that Quentin apparently accepts the description: "...it was that innocence again, that innocence which believed that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of a cake or pie... from which nothing but a cake or pie could come out." (p. 263) Later he imagines his grandfather chiding Sutpen for his innocence: "what conscience...warranted you in the belief that you could have bought immunity from her (the part-Negro wife Sutpen rejected) for no other coin but justice!" (p. 265) Whether or not he realizes it, Quentin imbues Sutpen with the same rigid, "innocent" morality that he himself espouses. That he can understand the weakness of Sutpen's moral beliefs makes Quentin's emotional state even more poignant, as we shall see more clearly later.

From Sutpen's design Quentin and Shreve turn to the puzzle that haunts Rosa and baffles Compson--the Bon-Judith-Henry tragedy. This situation receives the most imaginative, probing narration from Quentin and Shreve, the passage of time not lessening their identification with the young Sutpens. Quentin tells Shreve that he learned from Henry
that Don was Sutpen's part-Negro son, offering this fact as Henry's motive for killing him to prevent his marriage to Judith. We cannot know from the evidence Faulkner gives us (the conversation between Henry and Quentin in the old mansion is only alluded to—not presented; we can only assume there was one) whether Quentin really got this information from Henry or whether he created it to fit into a pattern of Southern morality with which he himself is struggling. As mentioned earlier, however, the truth of Bon's heritage and Henry's knowledge of it is perhaps not so important as that Quentin accepts and enlarges upon the ideas. Through Quentin's eyes we see the moment when Sutpen tells Henry that Bon is his brother, the scene by Henry's view of Bon and Judith, the lovers, in the garden. The romance in Quentin's soul, there in spite of his hatred for human weakness, is evident in the scene he creates.

Quentin's own struggle with family honor and morality is evident in his portrait of Henry. Juxtaposing Henry's discovery of Bon's identity with the view of Bon and Judith in the garden intensifies the immediacy and horror that Henry supposedly felt in the situation. Later Quentin imagines Henry in a frenzied battle with himself to accept the incest that Bon's marriage to Judith will insure:

"'Wait. Wait. Let me get used to it,'" (p. 340) he begs Bon. Then, "'You shall not. Shall not.'" (p. 340) But Bon pays little attention to him. Henry looks for something that will excuse the sin of the impending marriage,
coming up with a Lorraine duke that married his sister; he later pushes the problem aside temporarily with the hope that "the war will settle it..." (p. 342) His own indecision, as does Quentin's, nearly drives him mad, until he almost welcomes Bon's firm decision to marry Judith because it represents decisive action. (p. 347)

In Quentin's version of the Sutpen it is the threat of miscegenation rather than incest that finally forces Henry to destroy Bon. Quentin's decision to separate Henry's discovery of the two threats presented by Bon perhaps indicates his need to have Henry consider the incest question alone, as Quentin considers it alone. Not until later does he reveal the pending miscegenation—the concept that enlarges Quentin's personal dilemma to the dilemma of the South as a whole.

Equally important in Quentin's story is the role of Charles Bon. He and Shreve employ perhaps more invention in their depiction of Bon than in any other section of their narrative, although, as critic Waggoner points out, the boys know less about Bon than about any other character in their story. From Compson's description of a world-weary sophisticate the boys create a rather fatalistic character fully aware of his identity who purposely makes Henry's acquaintance to gain access to Sutpen. They speculate on whether Charles learned his identity from his mother or from a lawyer that the boys create as part of their story, but they agree that Bon knew his relation to the Sutpens.
Through the boys' eyes we see a Bon who wants only to be recognized by the man who deserted him so long ago--a Bon who, in a sense, like Quentin, dies for the values of the South. He knows what Henry must do if he refuses to give up Judith: Southern "law" dictates that black men cannot touch white women. In a single sentence, the last sentence that Quentin has Bon speak in his version of the story, Bon expresses the racial and family honor so vital to the Southern code and to Quentin's current mental anguish:

"I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister."

(p. 358) Bon commits suicide as surely as Quentin does a few months later.

Thus Quentin and Shreve dramatize the facts of the Sutpen legend in their search for the truth about the past. That their version is as biased as those of Rosa and Quentin's father is evidenced by the moral struggle they create for Henry. "For Quentin, like Henry Sutpen, is obsessed with the idea of incest and with his own responsibility for his sister. And since Henry's gesture in killing Bon is identified with 'honor vindicated' and virginity protected, Quentin feels that only by repeating the gesture can he defend Compean honor." 17Vickery's statement indicates the choice Quentin must make--"of viewing the past symbolically or literally and of affirming or denying its design." 18 Quentin makes this decision as he tells his story; it is in his reconstruction that Henry and, to a lesser extent, Bon
affirm the principles of rigid morality, family honor and racial purity that he espouses and dies for.

Like the other narrators, then, Quentin merely re-states his beliefs in his version of the Sutpen legend. What separates him from Rosa, who can see little beyond her obsessive hatred, and his father, whose detachment prevents him from trying to understand the truth of the legend, is the element of choice: while he cannot help being exposed to the past, his final decision to reaffirm the past's values is purely his own. He is sensible to the distortion of the story in Rosa's hands, since he knows of her hatred for Sutpen, and he is painfully aware that he has had to listen too long to his father's story. He is even, as mentioned earlier, sensible to the flaw in Sutpen's moral rigidity that is, in a sense, like his own. His passionate "I don't hate the South" (p. 378) at the end of the novel reveals his commitment to the South, a South whose flaws he can at least partially understand. As Vickery points out, "He insists on the reality of his concepts and on the validity of the past the character of which he himself has helped to establish."19 His subsequent death reaffirms his commitment.

Thus, a circular view of history is presented in a variety of contexts in Faulkner's novel, as each of the narrators, as well as the man whose life they reconstruct, interpret the past according to his own biases. Even Quentin, sensible to at least some of the flaws of the past
and to the destruction caused by Sutpen's rigid code of honor, chooses to affirm its design rather than to take a lesson from it and go on living. What none of the characters in the novel seem to realize, as Vickery points out, is that "man's position is confined essentially to the present." Their inability to recognize this, she continues, paralyzes them in the form of the legend. That each of the narrators has helped to create that form binds them more securely in the circular pattern of history.

Like Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren chooses to tell a story about a man, southern governor Willie Stark, through the eyes of a narrator, Stark's hatchet-man Jack Burden. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the two authors' use of narration: Rose, Compson and Quentin are still to a certain extent external, struggling with the events they are attempting to relate, while Jack has come to terms with the past he is describing—a past that is as much the story of his life as it is the story of Stark's. Through Jack's eyes we see not only the rise and fall of a remarkably powerful machine, but also the maturation of a young "brassbound Idealist." We see him develop from a man who declines to and is perhaps unable to accept the flaws and responsibilities of his own humanity to a man who acknowledges those responsibilities and who is ready to step "out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time." (p. 430) The element of futurity in the preceding statement, the last sentence in the novel, summarizes
the basic difference between the influence of history in Warren's novel as compared to Faulkner's: in Faulkner's works history is seen subjectively as a personal reaffirmation of present values. This position tends to create a past-present circular pattern from which human beings, such as Quentin Compson, cannot escape. In Warren's All the King's Men, history is also recognized as personal and, to a certain extent, subjective; however, the characters, Jack Burden in particular, are able to look at history in a basically objective fashion and to turn to the past for knowledge about themselves and about humanity in general. This knowledge aids the characters in the future and tends to create a spiral, rather than a circular, pattern of history.

Jack Burden's confrontation with the past, as pointed out earlier, is forced by his job as hatchet-man for Governor Willie Stark. For political reasons Jack is sent home to Burden's Landing, a quietly respectable southern town, to "dig up the dirt" on Judge Irwin, an important figure in state politics and a man Jack has respected and loved all his life. Jack discovers an instance of political corruption that destroys the judge and shatters his own heritage by leading to the revelation that the judge was Jack's father. Like Quentin, Jack learns that he cannot escape his past or the past of those around him. Unlike Quentin, Jack is able to accept the responsibility of history. To fully appreciate the significance of Jack's showdown with
the past and the knowledge that he takes from this confronta-
tion, we must look at the young Jack Burden, the "brass-
bound Idealist" who accepted the political hatchet-man job.

Until his showdown with Irwin and his own past, Jack
is, in a sense, a Quentin-type character. As Quentin refused
to accept the imperfections of humanity, Jack shuns involve-
ment with people, treating them as objects void of the emo-
tions and thoughts that make people individual human beings.
As Quentin expected people to accept and follow his own
rigid moral code, Jack puts people into equally rigid cate-
gories, deserting them when they threaten to break out of
their "roles." This aloofness is illustrated in Jack's
relationship to his parents, his first love, his wife, his
attitude toward his chosen field of study (history) and in
the motives that led him to become part of the political
machine that made Willie Stark governor.

Jack's homelife may be divided into two separate sub-
jects: his relationship to his parents and his relationship
to Judge Irwin and the Stantons, another respected, polit-
ically prominent family from Burden's Landing. Through the
mature Jack Burden's eyes we see a small child at first
bewildered then aloof to the stream of husbands taken by
his attractive mother. When Jack returns to Burden's Land-
ing to do his work on the judge, he visits his mother not
because he really wants to see her but because he feels it
is the proper thing to do. He describes the call as one in
a series that are "always the same" (p. 110); his meticulouis
description of his mother's behavior and his own response intensifies the feeling that the visit is only a play and that he and his mother are acting out their assigned roles. Jack hides any feeling for his mother under careful analysis of her "technique" of handling men. He is careful to pass no judgments that would indicate his personal involvement with his mother; he takes pains to remain a detached observer. The hardness that Jack has developed is equally evident when he visits his father in an effort to get information about Judge Irwin. The elder Burden, whom Jack has typecast as the Scholarly Attorney, has become a shabby, religious man who specializes in helping the unfortunate.

As he looks at the kind old man, Jack remembers scenes from his childhood before his parents separated and admits that "my guts went warm and a big lump seemed to dissolve in my chest..." (p. 200) For the first time he refers to the man as "father," but he suddenly pulls himself back to the present, swallows any tenderness he might have felt for the old man and gets back to business of digging up dirt on Judge Irwin. The old man refuses to help him, so the visit is ended.

The unpleasantness and scorn that Jack associates with his parents is sharply contrasted by his fond, idealized memories of Judge Irwin and the Stantons. Yet his attitude toward these Burden's Landing residents is also detached and unrealistic—he sees Judge Irwin and Adam and Anne Stanton as ideals rather than as real human beings. The
judge, ironically, represents a father figure to Jack; even as an adult Jack believes the old man to be incorruptible.
"Maybe not on the judge," Jack says over and over when Governor Stark tells him that there is always some bit of dirt to be found on everyone's record. Jack reveres the man, but he cannot see him as a real person.

His attitude toward Adam and Anne Stanton, his friends since childhood, is much the same. The brother and sister are children of a former governor of the state; they represent not only friendship but also the solid, unquestionable respectability and honor that Jack associates with Burden's Landing. Jack recalls a long-ago picnic with the Stantons when he "first saw Anne and Adam as separate, individual people, whose ways of acting were special, mysterious, and important." (p. 113) He for the first time sees Anne as a desirable female, but the image he recalls so vividly from that picnic is far more idealized than one of human sexuality:

The image I got in my head that day was the image of her face lying in the water, very smooth, with the eyes closed, under the dark, greenish-purple sky, with the white gull passing over. (p. 119)

The pure, chaste quality that emerges from Jack's vision is not unlike the idealized picture of Caddy that Quentin cannot bear to see destroyed. Anne's eventual fall from innocence is indeed difficult for Jack to handle. His final acceptance of Anne's imperfections is indicative of the difference between Quentin and himself.
Years later, after their romance has become serious, the same haunting image prevents Jack from making love to Anne. Since that day at the beach, Anne has represented purity and chastity to Jack. By touching her Jack would destroy the saintlike image of Anne that he has created and would force himself to see her as a full human being rather than as a symbol. His unwillingness to destroy that image, which echoes Quentin's refusal to accept Caddy's sexuality, keeps Jack from any deep involvement with Anne, and they go their separate ways. Jack does marry later, but he makes it clear that his bride, Lois, is merely a lovely sexual machine. Lois is an interesting and appropriate successor to Anne. Jack enjoys the physical aspect of love with her that he could not share with Anne. He has rejected the spiritual bonds of love for the purely physical relationship; he cannot accept both aspects of love from one person because that person would become a full human being who would require a deep commitment from Jack. Indeed, when Jack realizes that Lois has feelings and opinions as well as sexual prowess he leaves her to prevent being "destroyed:"

...as long as she was merely the machine-Lois, as long as she was simply a well-dressed animal, as long as she was really a part of innocent nonhuman nature, as long as I hadn't begun to notice that the sounds she made were words, there was no harm in her and no harm in the really extraordinary pleasure she could provide. It was only when I observed that this Lois was mixed up with the other Lois, with certain human traits, that I began to feel that all works of man might be swallowed up in the quagmire. (p. 304)

Looking back on the brief marriage, the mature Jack is able
to realize that he married not a person but an object. Just as he runs from involvement with Anne when she threatens to become human instead of an image of purity, he runs from involvement with the Lois who emerges as a human being as well as a machine.

From the above discussion we can see that the young Jack Burden retreats from the responsibility of deep involvement with other human beings. He tends to place people in categories (the Scholarly Attorney, machine-Lois), and when the people threaten to fall outside the category (as when Lois opens her mouth or when Anne agrees to become Jack's lover) Jack runs from them.

In a further attempt to isolate himself from the trials of human existence he turns to the past by studying for a Ph.D. in history. Given Warren's concept of the importance of history it is ironic that Jack deliberately chooses to study it, but because of Jack's misconceptions about the true nature of history his decision is completely in keeping with his attitude toward life. Unlike Quentin, who feels suffocated by the inseparability of history and his own life, Jack feels that the past is a "safe" subject, a review of facts and figures of a dead time that offers refuge from the all-too-human present. For his dissertation he chooses to write a history of life during the Civil War, based on the life of an ancestor of his named Cass Mastern. During his painstaking research for "the facts" about the man and his times Jack becomes dimly aware that objective facts
don't explain the truth about human beings past or present.
He runs, however, from this awareness as he ran from Anne
and was to run from Lois. Not until his second "excursion
into the past," (p. 157) the investigation of Judge Irwin,
does Jack come to terms with history and realizes that the
past is anything but impersonal; before that he ties up all
the facts about Mastern into a neat package with his name
on it and tucks them away into a corner.

Cass Mastern, Jack discovers from a packet of letters
and journals given him by a distant relative, was a well-to-
do, intelligent young man whose life was largely controlled
by his domineering brother Gilbert. Gilbert sent the rather
bookish Cass to Transylvania College in Kentucky, where
Cass pursued both learning and, for the first time, the
pleasures of alcohol, horseracing and women. He became
involved with Annabel Trice, the wife of his closest friend,
who committed suicide upon discovering his wife's relationship
with Cass. Stricken with guilt and fear of discovery, Anna-
bel decided that her young mulatto maid Phebe knew too much
about her relationship with Cass and sold the girl down the
river. In an argument with Cass about Phebe, Annabel put
the blame for her husband's death squarely on Cass's shoul-
ders.

At this moment the responsibility not only for Trice's
death but also for Phebe's misfortune and Annabel's anguish
hit Cass hard, and he realizes a concept that was to govern
the rest of his life:
It was not merely the death of my friend...
I suddenly felt that the world outside of
me was shifting and the substance of things,
and that the process had only begun of a
general disintegration of which I was the
center. (p. 177)

He continued,

It was, instead, the fact that all of these
things—the death of my friend, the betrayal
of Phoebe, the suffering and rage and great
change of the woman I had loved—all had
come from my single act of sin and perfidy...
it was as though the vibration set up in the
whole fabric of the world by my act had spread
infinitely and with ever increasing power
and no man could know the end. (p. 178)

The tragic events caused by Cass's affair with Annabel made
him aware of the inescapable ties between human beings and
the responsibility that all human beings must bear for each
other. That he accepted this responsibility is evident in
the records of his later life. He went down river in a fu-
tile attempt to rescue Phoebe and also changed his entire con-
cept of slavery. He tried to work his plantation with free
blacks, later sending them north when the free-labor exper-
iment failed. When Civil War broke out Cass enlisted as a
private soldier, although he could have received a commission,
because he felt it his duty to walk with his fellow souther-
ers. He vowed, however, to never kill a man. He died of a
bullet wound just before the end of the war, a death he con-
siders only just in view of his past sin. On his deathbed,
he wrote a statement in his journal about the war that
restates the concept of the common responsibility of all man-
kind that he had learned after his affair with Annabel:
It is all over but the dying, which will yet go on...Men shall come together yet and die in the common guilt of man and in the guilt that sent them hither from far places and distant firesides. (p. 187)

Thus Cass enlarged the concept of his personal responsibility and guilt to include the responsibility of all mankind.

Jack has no trouble gathering these facts of Cass Eastem's life from the journals and letters left behind, yet he is unable to put the story on paper. In a discussion of the role of history in literature, Warren himself explains Jack's inability to complete his thesis:

[Jack] stumbled onto his family history, involving a character in his family, a couple of generations back, who had devoted his life to trying to find a moral position for himself. And this young man, without any moral orientation at all... couldn't face the fact that in his own blood, there was a man who had faced up to a moral problem in a deep way.

What Jack could neither understand nor put down on paper was the fact that Cass accepted responsibility for his own human imperfections and for the imperfections of all men. Coming to terms with the truth beyond the facts of Cass Eastem's life would inevitably point to the error of Jack's rejection of responsibility in human relationships; unwilling to do this, Jack runs away. That Eastem's comfortable background and intellectual bent are similar to Jack's is undoubtedly no accident: Warren has drawn the parallel to further illustrate Jack's reluctance to see himself and those around him as human beings.
After putting the unfinished dissertation aside, Jack, as he describes his behavior many years later, "entered upon one of the periods of the Great Sleep." (p. 109) He repeatedly turns to sleep as a means of escape. His discovery of Anne's mistress relationship with Willie Stark triggers a cross-country drive followed by days of intermittent slumber and drunkenness and the creation of a grand philosophy to shield himself from his feelings for Anne and the nagging thought that he had in some way "handed her over to Willie." (p. 311) That thought is "too horrible to face" (p. 311), so he exonerates himself from responsibility for Anne by creating the Great Twitch theory. The Great Twitch theory suggests that "all life is but the dark heave of blood and the twitch of the nerve." (p. 311) Jack's creation puts all relationships on a purely physical basis, eliminating the possibility of emotional or intellectual involvement. Anne thus becomes merely a body, indistinguishable from Lois or any other woman, and Jack's conscience is free from either guilt or jealousy about her affair with Willie.

The Great Sleep and the Great Twitch Theory complete the picture of shunning responsibility and human involvement that Jack has cultivated all his life. His hatchet-man job fits in well with his philosophy; he reduces people to facts and figures useful to the interests of the political machine.

"It was a perfect job for me," Jack reflects, "for, as I have said, I was once a student of history. A student of history does not care what he digs out of the ash pile,
the hidden, the sublunary dung heap which is the human past." (p. 157) Jack's theories hold up until his second excursion into the past, when the "ash pile" hits home.

Until Jack undertakes the Irwin investigation, he is very similar to Quentin Compson. On the surface, their opinions of the past's effect on the present seem opposite: Quentin cannot separate it from the present, while Jack tries to dismiss it as bare facts from a dead time. Yet both expect life, past and present, to conform to their personal, rigid set of standards; both refuse to accept their humanity and the imperfections that go with being human. Jack's character separates from Quentin's only when he is forced to face history that does indeed have a devastating effect not only on his own life but also on the lives of those around him. He can no longer run away; that he is responsible for uncovering that history is too obvious to be denied.

In the course of his dirt-digging, Jack finds that Judge Irwin and former Governor Stanton (Adam and Anne's father) were involved in political graft when Stanton was in office. His revelations of this information triggers a destructive chain of events. Like his ancestor Cass Mastern, Jack learns that his actions affect the lives of many other people in ways that he cannot predict. He first shows the information to Anne, then uses it as a kind of blackmail to convince Adam, a renowned surgeon, into heading a new hospital that Governor Stark is building. The evidence of
corruption shatters the idealized image of Governor Stanton held by both his children. The shock caused by the evidence indirectly leads Anne to become Willie's mistress. Although she later regrets her actions, she temporarily feels that her personal honor and dignity matter little after her father's image had been tarnished. Adam, portrayed throughout the novel as the proud, morally upright doctor, takes the hospital position to protect his father's name. But his hatred for Willie comes to a tragic head when he learns of Anne's relationship with the governor: he kills Willie and is himself shot by Willie's bodyguard. Adam is also very much a Quentin-figure in the novel. Like Quentin, he has rigid moral standards that admit no compromise; rather than accepting his adult sister's actions as her own business and part of life he chooses to die for the ideals of family honor. For in shooting Willie in public with no effort to conceal his actions Adam commits suicide just as surely as Quentin does when he jumps off the bridge.

The graft that Jack discovers causes a third death. When he confronts Judge Irwin with the evidence, the old man commits suicide. It is at this time that the impossibility of separating the present from the past becomes painfully clear to Jack: he learns that the judge was his father. He inherits the judge's home, bought by the corruption of long ago, from the man whose death he has caused. He also marries Anne Stanton. His inheritance and his marriage are symbolic of the human responsibility that he is now willing
and able to accept. The narrator Jack recalls that, upon learning of his inheritance, "I found that I...was weeping and saying, over and over again, 'The poor old bugger, the poor old bugger.' It was like the ice was breaking up after a long winter. And the winter had been long." (p. 354) The human compassion that he has denied himself for so long breaks through. He can marry Anne now because he can finally see her as a human being—her relationship to Wil-lie being one facet of her humanity—and he is no longer afraid of involvement with human beings. He accepts his inheritance and Anne because he knows that their imperfections are his imperfections because they are all part of life.

Having come to terms with history as a human experience as well as a body of facts, "Jack can return to the Cass Mastern story. He can now understand what Cass learned from his experience with human weakness and sin:"

Cass Mastern lived for a few years and in that time he learned that the world is all of one piece. He learned that the world is like an enormous spider web and if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration rippled to the remotest perimeter and the drowsy spider feels the tingle and he drowsy no more but springs out to fling the gossamer coils about you who have touched the web..." (p. 183)

The spider web image, illustrating the interdependence of all of humanity, replaces Jack's Great Twitch theory. Like Quentin, Jack learns that the past is never really past, but unlike Quentin, he is willing to see history as it is, accept himself for what he is, and face the future aided by his
knowledge. Jack at first tries to view history as an objective body of facts. He finds this impossible, because history deals with human beings who can still make their presence felt on the spider web that binds all humanity, past, present and future, together. Unlike Quentin, however, Jack does not try to change history; he attempts to understand history and its relationship to himself and to those around him. As the nature Jack puts it in the last lines of the novel, he is ready to stop "out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time." (p. 438)

The difference between the two views of history in the Faulkner novels, then, lies in the way each author's characters accept and interpret what they find in the past. Faulkner and Warren would agree that the past is intensely personal rather than an objective collection of facts, but they differ in the way this personal history affects their characters. Quentin, Miss Rosa and Mr. Compton each have a different idea of the "truth" about the past, because each conceives the past subjectively in terms of his own prejudices and interprets it in a manner that reaffirms his own beliefs. Past and present become so hopelessly enmeshed that the narrators forget that "...man's position is confined essentially to the present."23 The characters, especially Quentin, are unable to realize this and as a result become "helplessly paralyzed by [history's] form."24 The vicious circle of history that emerges provides little
chance for a view of the future.

In the Warren novel, however, the narrator uses the past to help him define the present and the future. Jack's objective view of history is shattered when his dispassionate search into the past reveals information about his own identity. Instead of interpreting his discovery in terms of his present existence, however, Jack uses the past to better understand himself and those around him. History, Jack comes to realize, is part of his being—a being which must grow as he steps into "the awful responsibility of Time." (p. 438)

The spider image suggests an ever-increasing flow of movement and a spiral theory of history, in which knowledge of the past helps men to better understand the present and future. Warren has a Quentin character in Adam, who prefers his ideal version of the past to a less attractive one that provides more knowledge about mankind; this character is destroyed just as Quentin is destroyed. The survivors of the showdown with history in this novel are Jack and Anne—the individuals who can accept the goodness and the sins of the past and can draw from their knowledge of humanity that enables them to face the future.

Thus, in terms of the novels, the Thomas Cutten story represents to Quentin, Rose and Compton an historical vehicle for reaffirming their own beliefs. No knowledge can be taken from such a stance; a circular pattern of history results. In contrast, the Cass Mastorn story and
the information that Jack gleans from his investigation of Judge Irwin represents knowledge that increases Jack's knowledge of himself and of people in general. This view reflects a spiral theory of history, in which the "truth" about history is a constantly-changing process. As man discovers his past he adds his new-found knowledge to what he already knows to build the future.
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11 Maggoner, p. 103.


14 Backman, p. 107.


16 Maggoner, p. 161.


18 Vickery, p. 92.


20 Vickery, p. 102.


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