

TRYING TO SAY IT ALL IN ONE SENTENCE:
MAKING MEANING/MAKING FICTION AND THE SYNTAX OF DESPAIR
IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

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TRYING TO SAY IT ALL IN ONE SENTENCE:

MAKING MEANING / MAKING FICTION AND THE SYNTAX

OF DESPAIR IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

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ABSTRACT

The extremity of William Faulkner's use of relative clauses and appositives in Absalom, Absalom! is a syntactical representation of the inability of its narrators to create a satisfactory history of the Sutpen family, the South, and America.

Contrary to current critical thinking about Absalom, Absalom!, the novel does not provide a coherent, "true" account of the Sutpen family, nor is Faulkner engaged in the playful indeterminacy of postmodernism. Its syntactical complexities derive from a desperate struggle to understand the paradox of the South's "revolution"--as it is epitomized in the design of Thomas Sutpen--and Faulkner is not at ease with the fact that all solutions must be fiction. Because the narrators either cannot explain certain facts or refuse to accept the explanations they do construct, they incessantly repeat and re-examine the same data in differing patterns. Thus the digressions and expansiveness of the grammar are a function of the attempt to make meaning out of the facts at hand.

Faulkner's use of long, expansive appositives and relative clauses repeats yet adds to information readers already possess, while the restrictive relative clause assumes certain information as known, when in fact it is brand new. This presupposition and repetition causes difficulty in the novel's cohesiveness: presupposition, in particular, assumes the reader's familiarity

with material the reader is not in fact familiar with, forcing readers to wait for the material that would make the interpretation of the presupposed material possible. A comparison of Light in August and Absalom, Absalom! shows that Absalom, Absalom!'s crisis of cohesiveness is a function of its failure to find a satisfactory explanation of the paradox of Sutpen's design: where Light in August can relate the story of Joe Christmas with limited recourse to the resources of the appositive and relative clause, Absalom, Absalom! uses these features to excess. In Absalom, Absalom! it is the process of historical reconstruction that is foregrounded, while Light in August is much less reflexive. The reason for the difference in syntax is in the difference of the vision of the past and its effect on the present--in Light in August the past is knowable and its consequences tragic; in Absalom, Absalom! the past is unknowable and its consequences felt yet unspecifiable. The Sutpen paradox--that in order to revenge himself upon the caste system that humiliated him Sutpen seeks to acquire its accoutrements and participate in its maintenance--which is, by extension, the paradox of American history itself, is never satisfactorily resolved.

To Sue, and to my family

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	
APPROVAL PAGE.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
CONTENTS.....	vii
PART 1.....	1
ENDNOTES, PART 1.....	22
PART 2.....	26
ENDNOTES, PART 2.....	43
PART 3.....	51
ENDNOTES, PART 3.....	75
WORKS CITED.....	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	83

Part 1

I am telling the same story over and over, which is myself and the world. Tom Wolfe was trying to say everything, the world plus "I" or filtered through "I" or the effort of "I" to embrace the world in which he was born and walked a little while and then lay down again, into one volume. I am trying to go a step further. This I think accounts for what people call the obscurity, the involved formless "style", endless sentences. I am trying to say it all in one sentence, between one Cap and one period.--Faulkner to Malcolm Cowley, 1948

My ambition...is to put everything in one sentence--not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present, second by second.--Faulkner to Malcolm Cowley, 1948

I

Absalom, Absalom! is a novel in search of a meaning for the story it has to tell. Its narrators search (in vain, I will argue) for a satisfactory way to understand the history of a family, a region, and ultimately a nation. The narrators' desire to understand what "really" happened always seems to end in inconclusive fictions that bring no closure and no peace. I begin with an examination of a specific instance of this problem, arguing ultimately that Faulkner's "involved formless style", as he describes it above, is a function of the despair engendered by the failure to find a final, acceptable meaning for the story he has to tell.

According to the "unnamed narrator" in Absalom, Absalom!, in a tent on a battlefield in Carolina in 1864 Thomas Sutpen tells Henry Sutpen that Charles Bon's mother is "part negro". As Shreve and Quentin construct it, prior to this moment Henry knew only that Bon was his half brother. The news shatters Henry. He had been prepared to allow Bon to marry Judith, after four years of struggling with the fact that such an act would constitute incest--now he knows that he will not be able to permit Bon to marry Judith. Bon says as much for Henry after Henry returns from the interview with his father: "So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear"(285).

At what point does Bon learn that he is "part negro"? If Henry says anything about his conversation with Sutpen when he returns to Bon, it is not reported. Assuming, then, that he does

not, Bon could not have known the subject of conversation between the two official Sutpens, unless he already knew of his mother's "taint" and was only waiting for Sutpen to tell Henry. We know that this cannot be the case because Faulkner has Shreve construct Bon as being unable to understand Sutpen's refusal to acknowledge his paternity: if only Sutpen will acknowledge that he is Bon's father, Bon will "renounce her [Judith]; I will renounce love and all; that will be cheap, cheap, even though he say to me 'never look upon my face again; take my love and my acknowledgement in secret, and go' I will do that; I will not even demand to know of him what it was my mother did that justified his action toward her and me" (261-262). If Bon knew his mother was "part negro" he would not need to "demand to know what it was my mother did that justified [Sutpen's] action toward her and me". Further, as Shreve imagines, it Bon's mother tells him nothing about his paternity until after he has figured it out for himself, and at no time does she mention the fact that either she or he is "part negro". It could be that Henry does tell Bon what Sutpen said and that the narrator expects us to infer this, despite the fact that, besides Bon's possessing knowledge about himself that he should not have, the text in no way prompts us to make this inference. But if we grant this, then I feel rather cheated by Faulkner: I would insist that the narrator deal with the effect that this revelation about his mother has on Bon. To have Bon react as if he had this knowledge all along is inconsistent with both Shreve's and Mr. Compson's characterization of him. There is no consistent characterization of Bon that would make his statement to Henry ("So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, that you cant bear") comprehensible.

The critical response to this insoluble problem has been to locate the "poetically true" story of Henry and Bon in the italicized "vision" narrated by the unnamed narrator: Faulkner, critics argue, lifts the narrative out of the voices of Quentin and Shreve and gives it to an unattributed voice that we are to

grant final authority¹. This, finally, is "what really happened". But with respect for these scholars, at this point I have, like Quentin, come up against something I "cannot pass". For if I make this move, I find the result highly unsatisfying. Faulkner seems to be guilty of a cop-out. A writer cannot give as much space to Shreve's construction of Bon as Faulkner has done and then discard it without taking the time to articulate an alternative explanation which would construct Bon as having knowledge of his maternal racial inheritance and deliberately withholding it from Henry. While I am not adverse to concluding that the novel is flawed, I prefer an alternative explanation: this confusion about what Bon knows and doesn't know points up the fictional nature of everything that is said about him. His "true story", as separate from the stories told about him by Rosa, Quentin, Shreve, and Mr. Compson, is simply not present in the novel. If Faulkner himself knew what he wanted Bon's "true story" to be, he does not reveal it to us. The leap that the unnamed narrative voice makes by giving Bon knowledge of his racial background is therefore justified as one more voice making sense of Bon's death as best it can.

To whose imagination, after all, does the scene on the Carolina battlefield belong? To whose imagination does Faulkner's imagination grant the scene on the Carolina battlefield? To whom does he give it to be imagined? Let's look at the problematical place itself:

He ceased again. It was just as well, since he had no listener. Perhaps he was aware of it. Then suddenly he had no talker either, though possibly he was not aware of this. Because now neither of them was there. They were both in Carolina and the time was forty-six years ago, and it was not even four now but compounded still further, since now both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon, compounded each of both yet either neither, smelling the very smoke which had blown and faded away forty six years ago from the bivouac fires...(280)

An unnamed narrative voice has stepped in. It seems to be constructing what Quentin and Shreve are constructing--imagining what they must be imagining. I use modals here (seems, must)

because it mirrors what the narrative voice is doing: **guessing** about the inner workings of two characters who are viewed from the outside: it can only say that "perhaps" Shreve was aware that he had no listener, and that it was "possibly" true that he was aware that no one was talking. From this point, the narrative voice begins to make definite, unmodalized statements about what is happening in the minds of Quentin and Shreve: "They were [not "might have been" or "seemed to be"] both in Carolina...". But Quentin and Shreve are always doing this: they begin to imagine with guesses and estimates, and when one guess seems right or takes hold, the modalities drop and a possibility becomes a fact². The narrative voice, then, is also engaged in fiction-making, making fictions for Quentin and Shreve on behalf of the reader, helping us to imagine what they are imagining when they are silent and don't tell us themselves³. It seems clear, then, that the suppositions of the narrative voice have no more authority than those of Quentin and Shreve. To answer my initial question, it seems that the battlefield in Carolina is the product of the imaginations of Quentin and Shreve, **as imagined by the unnamed narrative voice!** That voice carries no more authority than any other voice, functioning as it does to fill in the silences in the imaginings of the primary speakers. Just as Shreve and Quentin must imagine "what really happened", the unnamed narrative voice must imagine them imagining "what really happened". The real history of the Sutpen family, finally (and this I think is the cause of profound despair in the novel), is fiction. I will argue that as a Modernist, Faulkner sees the loss of stable "truths" as a symptom of decay, and does not, as many have argued, relish it as an opportunity for play.

I begin with this discussion of Bon's sudden knowledge of his maternal inheritance because it speaks to the problems of history, fiction, and knowledge that have been at the center of the critical debate over Absalom, Absalom! in recent years. It has been a commonplace of postmodern critical discourse to

celebrate the kind of indeterminacy of meaning that Absalom, Absalom!* seems to insist upon. Gerhard Hoffman is representative of the position that sees Absalom's denial of one "true" history for the Sutpens as a forerunner of the postmodern attitude to history:

Absalom, Absalom! makes history a playing-field for the imagination, and the relationship between truth and imagination is not finally settled. The imagination alone is able to summon the past and its truth--but only as fiction. Truth and fiction enter into an indissoluble union, which for modernism and Faulkner is most disturbing, but also--so it seems at times--a reason for the author to play (in the postmodern mode of possibility narration) with the expectations, reasoning, and concerns of the reader. The fact that all possibilities lead to an impossibility (of telling the truth and establishing one's identity) is the final (suspensive) irony of the book and indicates that it breaks open the existential mode and opens up towards something new and playful which is still undefinable.

Notice the rhetoric of "play"--"playing-field", "a reason for the author to play", "something new and playful"-- as it is set off against "modernism" and "the existential mode". The positive and negative value judgements that pervade recent criticism of Absalom are laid out clearly here. Against the position that defines "order and meaning as necessarily permanent and unitary", John T. Matthews argues that "Faulkner's distinctive modernity involves an understanding of meaning as the infinite play of signifiers, and not as the attainment of an absolute signified, the facts of the story itself"(119, emphasis added). Donald M. Kartiganer (quoting Heidegger), too, sees Faulkner's repetitive storytelling as a "repetition forward", which " 'does not mean either a mere mechanical repetition or an attempt to reconstitute the physical past; it means rather an attempt to go back to the past and retrieve former possibilities' "(30, emphasis in original). This type of repetition "becomes the fulfilment of possibilities only latent in the past, the completion of what

* Absalom, Absalom! will be referred to from now on as Absalom.

only the present can awaken" (30). In Absalom, he argues, Quentin revises [the past] into new, if still destructive, significance. His explanation [of Bon's murder] is his creative entrance into history, telling what the past has refused to know of itself. Quentin's end in suicide remains the controlling context of his explanation, but his repetition forward of the past has altered his identity from that of victim to that of tragic creator. (35)

Here the positive value of a creative engagement with the past seems to outweigh the negative nature of the "controlling context" of that creativity-- Quentin's suicide. This, for Kartiganer, differs from the narratives of The Sound and the Fury, which "combine a sense of extraordinary creative vitality with a sense of nostalgia or loss, touching on despair" (32). I think, though, that the same could be said for the narratives of Absalom. I find it very difficult to see a qualitative difference between Quentin as "victim" and Quentin as "tragic creator": there is as much "creative vitality" and "despair" in Absalom as there is in The Sound and the Fury.

David Krause also evaluates the indeterminacy of meaning in Absalom according to the positive/negative value judgements of postmodern criticism. He concludes that Faulkner asks us to read Absalom (using Barthes' term) as a "pensive text":

Barthes shows that a pensive text responds best to what he calls a "writerly" reading: that is, a reading fully open to the free play of signification, of language as sign system, unintimidated by the text's pensiveness but respectful of its reticences, its secrets. A "readerly" reading, driving toward the (chimerical) security of coherence, stasis, mimesis, representation of what is signified, will not satisfy the genuinely pensive text. (239)

Here again we have the positive rhetoric of play and a cherishing of indeterminacy, which Faulkner is supposed to cherish too, as opposed to the negative rhetoric of the chimerical security of coherence and static mimesis, which he apparently disdains. Krause urges readers of the novel to avoid reading it as Mr. Compson reads Bon's letter (cynically and nihilistically) and as Quentin reads the Sutpen family tombstones (an immersion in the "authority of others' voices" {234} and a subsequent loss of

self), both of which represent reading strategies that fail. Like Hoffman, Kartiganer, and Irwin, Krause wants to read Faulkner as a postmodernist-in-embryo, at ease with problems that drive his own characters to bitter nihilism, madness, and suicide.

Finally, Peter Brooks' investigation of the motives that compel Absalom's narrators--"motives that are highly charged emotionally but not specified or yet specifiably" (252)--leads him to conclude that

the seemingly universal compulsion to narrate the past in Absalom, Absalom!, and to transmit its words, may speak both of an unmasterable past and of a dynamic narrative present dedicated to an interminable analysis of the past. Faulkner's present is a kind of tortured utopia of unending narrative dialogue informed by a desire for a "revelatory knowledge." That knowledge never will come, yet that desire will never cease to actuate the telling voices. (267)

Brooks at least acknowledges some "torture" in the postmodern "utopia" of narration that is "fully dialogic, centerless, a transaction across what may be a referential void" (261). These critics are too eager to see Faulkner as one of their own, constructing him as a postmodern pioneer. They are content to applaud the novel's indeterminacy but fail to inquire about what it is that defies determinacy--what is it about the past that Absalom's narrators construct that makes its analysis "interminable"? What are they seeking "revelatory knowledge" of? For postmodernism, of course, these questions are not important. But Faulkner was a Modernist, and they would have been important to him. I will argue that the "revelatory knowledge" sought by the novel's narrators is to be found in the resolution of the paradox inherent in the "design" of Thomas Sutpen. A paradox is by definition unsolvable, yet is endlessly fascinating, a knot yoking irreconcilables together. It is the attempt to untie the knot that is Sutpen's design that prompts Absalom's endless narration.

What is the paradox of Sutpen's design? It is that Sutpen, as a result of being profoundly humiliated by his first encounter with his culture's caste system, sets out not to overturn and

defeat that system but to acquire the accoutrements of, participate in, and preserve the same system that reduced him and his family to "cattle, creatures heavy and without grace" (190). The design takes shape in a dialogue with his own innocence:

'If you were fixing to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first thing you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle you could borrow or steal or make, wouldn't it?' and he said Yes. 'But this aint a question of rifles. So to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what he did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with.' (192)

Sutpen apparently later tells General Compson that "the boy-symbol was just a figment of the amazed and desperate child" (210), and that now, when "his turn came for a little boy without any shoes on and with his pap's cutdown pants for clothes" to knock on his door,

he would take that boy in where he would never again need to stand on the outside of a white door and knock on it, and not at all for mere shelter but so that that boy, that whatever nameless stranger, could shut that door himself forever behind him on all that he had ever known, and look ahead along the still undivulged light rays in which his descendants who might not even hear his (the boy's) name, waited to be born without ever having to know that they had once been riven forever free from brutehood just as his own (Sutpen's) children were... (210)

In adopting the vocabulary of the planter's caste (this hypothetical boy is to be delivered from "brutehood") Sutpen is counter-subversive. His impulse in its initial conception was counter-revolutionary, as it required that Sutpen become that which he intended to "combat".

David Minter summarizes Hannah Arendt's argument in On Revolution in a way that expands the significance of the paradox of Sutpen's design:

Arendt's subject, and her regret--that America has lost touch with its revolutionary tradition--need not concern us here. But her sense of how and why that loss occurred should. Her argument runs like this: it is because America has failed to "remember" its revolutionary tradition, and failing to remember it has failed to talk of it, or rather to talk of it incessantly, and failing to talk of it

incessantly has failed to understand and appropriate it, that it now fears and resists the revolutions of others. (80)

The narrators of Absalom are involved in this work of remembering and incessant talk: insofar as they are narrating Sutpen's history, and insofar as Sutpen's history is about the paradox inherent in America's "revolutionary tradition", they are talking incessantly in an attempt to "understand and appropriate" their own revolutionary history; they are intensely, tediously, and desperately focused on the paradox of that revolutionary history itself as it is exemplified in the (to use a Faulknerism) "unrevolution" of Thomas Sutpen. But for Absalom's narrators remembering and talking do not necessarily lead to understanding and appropriation: understanding is temporary, and when it is achieved it is denied ("I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!"). And yet, as Minter says, "remembering, talking, and listening...provide [Absalom's narrators'] only means of taking hold of the experiences and traditions that have shaped [their families] and [their] region..." (87). I will argue that the endless search for and denial of understanding that is engendered by the paradox of Sutpen's history creates and is created by Absalom's unique style.

II

Though I am disputing the rhetoric of play, which tends to construct Faulkner as a man who would have been at ease with Derrida, I am not interested so much to dispute critical judgements as I am to demonstrate the largely unacknowledged role that style has played in generating those interpretations. A description of the major features of Faulkner's style in Absalom and the role that it plays--if any--in any given critic's interpretation of the book is lacking in most studies of Absalom. My own contribution will be a grammatical description of a dominant stylistic feature and an interpretation of that feature in terms of the role it plays in the storytelling.

But first a survey. Most attempts to describe Faulkner's

style in Absalom are merely incidental, so that style is not so much described as it is accounted for. There is, however, an interesting pattern in the accounts of the meaning of the style that points to an unarticulated critical consensus on the meaning of style. Donald Kartiganer begins his article on Faulkner in the Columbia Literary History with the sentence "The first facts are the sentences, the acts of style"(886), but moves quickly away from description to account for its meaning. He links it to the quotes from Faulkner that I have used for my epigraph ("to say it all...between one Cap and one period...to put everything into one sentence--not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and keeps overtaking the present, second by second"), which he suggests creates "a kind of writing that seems to demonstrate and depend on the necessary failure of writing even as it pleads the value of its effort and its supreme hope"(887). We can find a similar claim in Olga Vickery's enduring study of Faulkner:

...truth must eventually be fixed by words, which by their very nature falsify the things they are meant to represent. This distortion inherent in language is the reason for the torturous style of Absalom, Absalom!...the long sentences bristle with qualifications and alternatives beneath which the syntax is almost lost.(86)

Here the style is explained as an attempt to compensate for the slippage of the signified from under the signifier:

"qualifications and alternatives" attempt to compensate for the "distortion [of the truth] inherent in language". Both Kartiganer and Vickery link style to the process of fiction-making around an unknowable center: the "truth".

Susan V. Donaldson goes one step further. In connecting style to the fact that Absalom's narrators are "determined to impose order and sequence on the story of Thomas Sutpen"--determined to construct a meaningful, ultimately fictional, plot-plot--she is in line with Vickery and Kartiganer. But she notices something else, too:

the effort to find connection is underscored by the hypotactic style eventually appropriating the stories of

each and every one of the narrators. The length and complexity of their very sentences, as one subordinate clause inevitably follows another, reflect both their determination to make connections and the storytelling antecedents uniting them. (23)

While Donaldson is not alone in noticing the similarities in the narrative "voices", she is at least rare, if not alone, in linking those similarities to "the hypotactic style"⁴. But there is still no attempt to describe in detail that aspect of voice that all the narrators have in common⁵.

While Kartiganer, Vickery, and Donaldson all explicitly but sketchily link style to the exploration of the "truth", there are critics for whom an investigation of style would seem to be right around a corner they assiduously refuse to turn. Joseph A. Boone, while noticing "the extreme perversity, the downright irritability of [Faulkner's] narrative method" (211) and "Rosa's garrulous narrative style, elongated by seemingly endless and frustrating repetitions" (229), uses terms like "narrative method" and "narrative style" as if the sentences in which method and style manifest themselves were invisible to him. Hugh Kenner also speaks of Faulkner's narrative in a way that would seem to point to sentence structure: "no Faulkner incident can yield its significance until it has tangled circumambient lives and circumstances even to the third and fourth generations" (110). This tangling actually occurs in the syntax of the sentences themselves: it has a specifiable location in the text which Kenner ignores. Peter Brooks notices that Rosa's narrative assumes that the reader already knows the basic plot of Sutpen's story, so that "by the close of the first chapter...there is a split and polarization: narrating on the one hand, an epic historical story on the other, and no narrative plot or design to join them" (253). An investigation of syntax reveals that the plot information Brooks is looking for is provided piecemeal in a distinctive grammatical construction, a point that goes unremarked in Brooks' narratological analysis.

But there is also a revealing pattern in the avoidance of

sentence structure analysis in Boone, Kenner, and Brooks: each writer notices complications, "irritability", tangles, and cohesive gaps in what they read. What the criticism of Absalom lacks is a grammatical description of the sentence structures that prompt readers to use these adjectives. The goal of this thesis is to provide that description, and to advance an interpretation of the novel based on that description. To this end I want to engage Colleen E. Donnelly's article more fully. Her analysis of modality, qualifying adverbs, and direct and indirect discourse and their role in the creation and presentation of history in Absalom shares my interest in style, but differs in enlightening ways. I agree with Donnelly that Faulkner is involved in "historiography"--"a blend of data, prehistory, and a method of selection, speculation, and interpretation"(105)--and that his use of modality encodes this process. I disagree with her about the extent to which this process creates a convincing closure.

Donnelly's conclusion about the criticism around the relationship between truth and history in Absalom confirms my own: "Each critic talks about what storytelling is, or what history is, but either does not make the connection between the two or fails to elucidate how the language itself contributes to these thematic issues"(120)⁶. Her interest is primarily in the use of the modal qualifiers "perhaps", "doubtless", "believe", "imagine", etc., which have the effect of continually drawing questions of historical accuracy into the foreground(105). In this way, "Compson's engagement in the metahistorical process, rather than Sutpen's history, becomes the primary focus"(107); in this way,

imagination and belief are inextricably fused; Faulkner begins to define historical truth as that which is believed in, which has the power to explain as "history-for". "History-For", as Levi-Strauss defines it, is an attempt to probe psychological and ideological, rational and irrational, causes and results...in order to explain the necessity or inevitability of events. Such a probe requires engaging the imagination.(108)

Compson's (and Shreve's) modalized insistence on the veracity of the histories they construct, Donnelly argues, eventually persuades readers to accept them: we are "compelled to believe" (118) in the conclusions the speakers come to because we actually witness them in the process of arriving at their conclusions:

The increase in the use of metalanguage, the reflexive phrases, and the addition of the modal qualifiers, such as "must have" and "would have", heighten Compson's insistence on the veracity of his narrative. It is the very force of the qualifiers that draws attention to the metahistorical process, which, once driven into the foreground, makes the story being encoded seem all the more compelling and truthful. (109)

As I noted in my discussion of the Carolina battle scene, Donnelly argues that there is closure here, that the novel offers a complete historical reconstruction that we can be satisfied with: "The test for true historical reconstruction is whether the person engaged in the historical process finds his life and his fellow man's illuminated by it" (116-117). With the exception of Mr. Compson, Donnelly argues that the narrators meet this test.

But do they? Quentin and Shreve do "illuminate" Sutpen and the South, but what they find there is another darkness, the enigma and paradox of Sutpen's design. And in order to make that illumination possible, they have to make an imaginative leap (Bon's sudden and inexplicable knowledge of his racial background) which creates an inconsistency which, in turn, destabilizes the illumination itself. There is also an alternative, less positive, way to interpret the modal qualifiers which Donnelly sees as creating the compulsion to believe in the first place⁷. I would argue that the foregrounding of the "metahistorical process" via the modal qualifiers can also diminish the veracity of the assertions they preface. The use of "must", for example, encodes an anxiety about the veracity of the very statement it insists upon: if there were no alternatives, if the speaker were absolutely certain about the truth of the proposition, he would not feel the pressure to modalize. "Must"

tells us that the speaker does not know, and is extrapolating a conclusion from available and limited evidence. I do not see how the fact that the process is foregrounded necessarily "compels" anything, other than belief in the sincerity of the narrators' effort.

Just as the modality that Donnelly describes can make doubtful what it insists upon, Faulkner's use of the appositive and relative clause confounds closure through digressive opening. The oft-quoted observations on his style that I have used for my epigraphs above betray Faulkner's anxiety over containment: his desire to "get it all in" is, in a sense, a desire for closure, to say it all at once in the same place once and for all. The storytellers of Absalom share this desire and this anxiety. Donnelly's conclusions about the use of modality, while valuable, can be supplemented and adjusted by an investigation of a feature of Absalom's style that is at least as pervasive and characterizes greater lengths of text: users of English have designed structures for "trying to say it all in one sentence"--the relative clause and the appositive. These structures serve a "historiographical" purpose: they allow the novel's narrators to imaginatively explore and attempt to understand the events surrounding the Sutpen family before, during, and after the Civil War. But once begun, the exploration of these events cannot be stopped: each investigation reveals questions and conundrums that necessitate further investigation, which in turn require the exploration of yet another set of problems and questions. The stage is set for an infinite regress; closure--meaning, understanding--seems to get farther and farther away at each turn. The grammar in the service of this infinite regress becomes increasingly expansive: relative clauses open within relative clauses; almost an entire chapter is contained within a parenthetical. It is the exploration of the paradox of Sutpen's design which necessitates an "expansive" style: expansiveness is necessary in order to account for all of the facts and variables as the speaker struggles towards meaning. Yet that very

expansiveness only draws the speaker into deeper exploration, so that meaning, and hence closure, is found to be impossible. The coming-to-terms is given an urgency, a dimension of desperation, by the fact that the suicidal Quentin Compson is the narrator who hears all the stories. The problem is one of making meaning, of providing a straight and non-paradoxical plot for history, which manifests itself at sentence level in the the relative clause and the appositive. In order to come to grips with the paradox of their history--"to get it all in one sentence"--they must make use of these linguistic resources. For Quentin and Miss Rosa the task is an urgent one, as both seek to liberate themselves from the dead and rejoin the living.

III

Are Absalom's stylistic features unique? To what extent are they characteristic of Faulkner's style across his work? The expansive sentences that characterize Absalom make isolated appearances as early as Soldiers' Pay, but Faulkner's style varies from novel to novel. In the opening paragraph of Chapter II in Soldier's Pay, Januarius Jones is introduced and his name is explained through a long descent into an appositive (the nature and meaning of the appositive will be dealt with in much more detail in Part 2):

Jones, Januarius Jones, born of who he knew and cared not, becoming Jones alphabetically, January through a conjunction of calendar and biology, Januarius through the perverse conjunction of his own star and the compulsion of food and clothing--Januarius Jones baggy in grey tweed, being lately a fellow of Latin in a small college, leaned upon a gate of iron grill-work breaking a levee of green and embryonically starred honeysuckle, watching April busy in a hyacinth bed. (56)

Beginning with his last name, the sentence opens up in the middle with a series of appositives: "Januarius Jones", "born of...", "becoming Jones...", "January...", "Januarius..." so that he is defined first through the aetiology of his rather curious name. Then, in a move that will be typical of Faulkner's handling of this pattern in the later novels, the dash is used to mark a

reinstatement of the original subject, which is in jeopardy of being lost through the appositives. But just because the subject is renewed and reaffirmed does not mean Faulkner is ready to complete the sentence-- we fall into appositives again: "baggy in grey tweed", "being lately a fellow of Latin...". Finally, the main verb, "leaned", gives this by now well-developed and economically introduced subject something to do--"lean". The novel, in fact, begins with a less marked example of this use of appositives:

Lowe, Julian, number---, late a flying cadet, Umptieth Squadron, Air Service, known as "One Wing" by the other embryonic aces of his flight, regarded the world with a yellow and disgruntled eye. (7)

Without putting too much emphasis on it, we might say that the opening sentence of Faulkner's career as a novelist embodies, in a modest way, his ambition to "put everything in one sentence-- not only the present but the whole past on which it depends".

We find the pattern in Mosquitoes, too. Here, a succession of fragments are in apposition to "this room" (the NP's [noun phrases] in question are in bold):

What **this room** troubled was something eternal in the race, something immortal...**This unevenly boarded floor, these rough stained walls** broken by high small practically useless windows beautifully set, **these crouching lintels** cutting the immaculate ruined pitch of walls which had housed slaves long ago, slaves long dead and dust with the age that had produced them and which they had served with a kind and gracious dignity--shades of servants and masters now in a more gracious region, lending dignity to eternity.(11)

And this pattern of apposition expanding "this room" spawns another pattern, the relative clause⁸ beginning "which had housed slaves...". "Slaves" becomes the subject of the next appositive, which begins "slaves long dead". The source of the subject of the next appositive, "--shades of servants and masters" is uncertain. It may refer to "walls", or be a modification of "slaves". The adjective for this effect? I would use a word like "evocative": the succession of NP's in apposition to "this room" is a detailed study, into which can be

read the antebellum vision: "shades of servants and masters now in a more gracious region, lending dignity to eternity." From the present moment, we fall back into the past, read the past, the "long dead and dust" from the places they inhabited. Through the appositives, this becomes an exploration of a "racial memory", of that something "eternal in the race" suggested by the details of the room. Faulkner will very often use this expansive syntax to encode in language the working of memory.

But the first "full-grown" instance of the expansiveness characteristic of Absalom comes in Sartoris. As Narcissa Benbow considers the life and times of the Sartoris matriarch, Miss Jenny, the syntax begins to "unfold" through a proliferation of conjunctions --sentence-initial and coordinating--, restrictive relatives, appositives, and a compounding of noun phrases. Each of these features--and the situation in which they are used--is also typical of the pattern that dominates Absalom:

And Narcissa would sit, serene again behind her forewarned bastions, listening, admiring more than ever that indomitable spirit that, born with a woman's body into a heritage of rash and heedless men and seemingly for the sole purpose of cherishing those men to their early and violent ends, and this over a period of history which had seen brothers and husband slain in the same useless mischancing of human affairs; had seen, as in a nightmare not to be healed by either waking or sleep, the foundations of her life swept away and had her roots torn bodily from that soil where her forefathers slept trusting in the integrity of mankind-- a period at which the men themselves, for all their headlong and scornful rashness, would have quailed had their parts been passive parts and their doom been waiting. And she thought how much finer that gallantry which never lowered blade to foes no sword could find; that uncomplaining steadfastness of those unsung (ay, unwept too) women than the fustian and useless glamour of the men that obscured it. (357)⁹

As in Absalom, this is the syntax of a meditation, a rumination, a process that places Miss Jenny within a larger context. Its function here is very similar to its function in Absalom--this is not only an apostrophe to Southern femininity, looking ahead to Rosa Coldfield, but an apostrophe contextualized by the Civil

War, that "useless mischancing of human affairs"; its expansiveness really occurs around the noun phrase(NP)+prepositional phrase (prep.p) "a period of history". Faulkner seems to lose control of this structure: it loses grammatical sense through the appositive beginning "born with a woman's body...". The subject of this appositive, "that indomitable spirit", is left to hang alone after the appositive ends: that is, "that indomitable spirit" lacks the verb phrase necessary to avoid a fragment. Instead, the appositive ends with a semi-colon, signalling that the VP (verb phrase) "had seen" belongs to NP+Prep.P "a period of time" instead of the NP it seems to have been intended to belong to--"that indomitable spirit". In other words, is it "that indomitable spirit that...had seen...the foundations of her life" etc, or is it "a period of time which had seen...; had seen...the foundations of her life" etc? Is "that indomitable spirit" the subject, or is the subject "a period of time"? The grammatical answer is ambiguous, but the effect is interesting: Miss Jenny ("that indomitable spirit") and the war ("a period of time") become indissolubly linked in terms of identity. What she sees is also what the period itself sees, so that the seeing of an individual stands in for the impersonal seeing of an objective historical moment: a subjective seeing becoming objective, and an objective seeing becoming subjective. Perhaps this expansive structure is one of the features of Faulkner's work that has led scholars to use adjectives like "mythic" to describe it.

The expansive structure I have been tracing goes underground through The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, which we might expect from the latter, given its stream-of-consciousness technique and the verisimilitude of its (inner) voices. But that it does not emerge in the omniscient third person narrative of the last section ("April Eighth, 1928") of The Sound and the Fury surprises me. In fact, there we get just the opposite of what I am calling "expansive": the style "flattens" in this section, becomes minimalist and without affect or convolutions. But this

is entirely appropriate given that the focus of the chapter is Dilsey: the style creates an instantaneous identification with her through its very simplicity--the stream-of-consciousness that we drown in through the narratives of Quentin, Benjy, and Jason can have the paradoxical effect of alienating readers, estranging them through overwhelming intimacy. The stylistic "flat affect" of the last section, its objective descriptions of external movements and words, creates the equally paradoxical effect of intimate knowledge, pointing up a common, simple human bond between Dilsey and the reader¹⁰.

Our pattern resurfaces in Sanctuary, but not, interestingly, in the published version. The two versions of Sanctuary provide interesting stylistic cases in that the original draft that Faulkner claimed to be so ashamed of is stylistically more complicated and "literary" than the revised, popularized, version that was eventually published. The original text of Sanctuary demonstrates other ways to be expansive: prepositional phrases in apposition to, in this case, "he was thinking of" can and do expand over long stretches of text, so that the VP sets off a flow of images (preposition and NP in bold):

He was thinking of the first time he had seen it, lying in a wooden box behind the stove in that ruined house twelve miles from town; **of Popeye's black presence** lying upon the house like the shadow of something no larger than a match falling monstrous and portentous upon something else otherwise familiar and everyday and twenty times its size; **of the two of them**--himself and the woman--in the kitchen lighted by a cracked and smutty lamp on a table of clean, spartan dishes and Goodwin and Popeye somewhere in the outer darkness peaceful with insects and frogs and yet filled too with Popeye's presence in black and nameless threat. (Original Text, 9)

The effect is almost mimetic, encoding in language the imagistic movements of memory, memories that arise and dissolve into each other in response to each other, strophe and antistrophe. Again, the adjective is "evocative", and as in the passage from Sartoris quoted above, it is a syntactical image of "ruminantion". Memory is sorting through itself, turning itself

over.

The relative clause makes an appearance here too (the relative pronoun is in bold):

That was with Harry Mitchell, **who** never pretended to offer her anything but money, **who** had probably learned to believe from her that that was what she wanted and **who** would have given it to anyone else that asked for it; **who** had to build pools and tennis courts and buy a new car twice a year to get rid of what Belle had been too inert, too richly bemused in discontent, to spend. (Original Text, 16)

Under the rubric, under the valence, of the subject "Harry Mitchell", there is a collage of defining details. But this is still not the only way to achieve expansiveness: In Absalom Faulkner will exploit a conjunction+NP+Present Participle verb to create an effect similar to this one from Sanctuary (the pattern is in bold):

That was after he loosened up a little, talking, about Manila and Mexican girls, **and the halfwit guffawing and chortling and glugging** at the jug **and passing it and saying** "take some mo'" **and the woman listening** inside the door **and Horace thinking**, Where were you then? when did he meet you and what could he have said to you to fetch you out here to live like a nigger, doing your own work, waiting for that inevitable day when he'll be caught or killed, and she'll have to start over again. (Original Text, 55)

The effect is one of rapidity or simultaneity, as though all of this were occurring not only quickly, but at the same time, the "guffawing and chortling and glugging...and passing...and saying...and...listening...and...thinking" not occurring in chronological sequence but experienced at once. I think this is related to the NP+Prep p pattern I discussed above: here, too, there is the accumulation of related images; it is memory itself that is at work here, ordering the flow of the pictures across the mind.

What is the effect of this pattern in these early novels? It seems to be employed to do three different but related things: it defines and deepens character; it encodes the workings of personal memory--its ruminations and imagistic associations; it is used to expand, extrapolate, and generalize from the concrete

to the abstract, from the specific to the general, deepening the significance of the present moment through an exploration of the past on which it depends¹¹. Each of these functions of expansiveness has an exploratory purpose: in Sartoris, for example, Narcissa's reflections--her ruminations, her brooding--on the character of Miss Jenny define that character through an expansion of her significance, and that expansion is effected through the choice of the grammatical resources of the appositive and relative clause in particular over the other forms of expansion. Appositive and relative clause expansion is also prevalent in Absalom, where it becomes not simply a device used in isolated circumstances, but the syntactical pattern that governs substantial stretches of text and is an image of the nature of the narrative itself.

Endnotes

1. Colleen E. Donnelly in "Compelled to Believe: Historiography and Truth in Absalom, Absalom!", argues that with the Carolina battle scene "Faulkner achieves a sense of closure. The quest for explanations is complete"(118). She claims that "by writing the passage in the historical present [using the present progressive tense of the verbs], Faulkner is also claiming that the "true" historical experience is being enacted in the present"(118). She puts the word true in quotation marks because she acknowledges that this is only a satisfyingly reconstructed truth and is not to be confused with what actually occurred, which is unknowable. But, as my investigation shows, it is actually much less satisfyingly reconstructed than she supposes.

2. Peter Brooks, in his "Incredulous Narration", sees the movement from guess to fact in Mr. Compson's narrative as well:

...Mr. Compson imagines the introduction of Henry to Bon in a series of clauses headed "perhaps," ending: "or perhaps (I like to think this) presented formally to the man reclining in a flowered, almost feminized gown, in a sunny window in his chambers," and then a page later has turned the hypothesis into solid narrative event...(112)

Colleen E. Donnelly's argument is that this movement from speculation to fact is both the novel's subject and modus operandi:

What matters is that the explanation arrived at--a tapestry woven from facts, speculations, logical deductions, dream, and visualization--makes historical reconstruction possible, if history is defined as the process by which we discover psychological, moral, and aesthetic explanations of the past that we are then compelled to believe.(118)

We are "compelled to believe" this history because it happens to "fit" at the time and place of its construction, which is ultimately the only kind of history we can have. While I agree with her about the contingent, temporary nature of the history that is constructed for Sutpen, I do not think that this process brings peace or closure: however we may feel as readers, Faulkner's narrators are unsatisfied with their constructions.

3. See Donnelly--"while outside or above the narrative proper, the unnamed narrator offers material as dubious as that of the character narrators...He acts as a model for readers, teaching them how to participate in the historical reconstruction of the family saga"(106)--and David Krause ("Reading Bon's Letter and

Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!): "Within Absalom's play of voices, that of the unidentified narrator as reader takes its place, but in no way a privileged place" (235).

4. Peter Brooks comments on the "transindividual voice"-- "narration here as elsewhere in Faulkner seems to call upon both the individual's voice and that transindividual voice that speaks through all of Faulkner's characters" (253)--as does Renard Donesky, who sees "the narration stemming from a fifth narrator", which "explains the stylistic similarities" (125) in the narratives of Rosa, Compson, Shreve and Quentin. It does not seem to me a very long step from this awareness of a "transindividual voice" to the observation that the speakers share a similar syntactical pattern. Like Brooks and Donesky, most critics seem to see right through the style and hear only mysteriously similar "voices".

5. I find it in the relative clause: see part 2, endnotes.

6. Michael J. Toolan generalizes this claim to Faulkner studies in general: "...actual interpretive evaluation of the style as analysed, with linguistically based hypotheses of the literary functions of distinct features, is rare" (58).

7. Modals are auxiliary verbs such as can/could, may/might, must, need, have (got) to, ought to, should, and will/would (A Student's Grammar, 60-64). Greenbaum and Quirk distinguish between two kinds of meanings for these auxiliary verbs, "intrinsic" (or deontic)--"which includes 'permission', 'obligation', and 'volition'" and "involves some intrinsic human control over events"-- and "extrinsic" (or epistemic), "which includes 'possibility', 'necessity', and 'prediction'" and "involves human judgement of what is or is not likely to happen" (60). The verbs listed above can have either extrinsic or intrinsic meaning, depending on how they are used. The examples given by Greenbaum and Quirk (A Student's Grammar, 60) show that the modal auxiliary **can**, for example, is used to estimate ability ("**Can** you remember where they live?"), possibility ("Even expert driver's **can** make mistakes") and permission ("**Can** we borrow these books from the library?"). Greenbaum and Quirk also say that "the truth value of a sentence can be changed (eg enhanced or diminished) by the use of adverbials" (A Student's Grammar, 160). They call these "adverbials of modality", and distinguish between three types: those used to create emphasis ("She **certainly** helped him with his research"), those used for approximation ("They are **probably** going to emigrate"), and those used for restriction ("I shall be in Chicago **only** until Thursday"). Donnelly is interested in Faulkner's use of extrinsic modals and adverbials of modality.

8. For a definition of relative clauses see Part 2, endnotes.

9. To get a sense of the extent to which appositives and relative clauses expand NP's, compare passages A and B below. Passage A is the passage as it appears in the text. Passage B is the same passage with the appositives and relative clauses deleted.

A: And Narcissa would sit, serene again behind her forewarned bastions, listening, admiring more than ever that indomitable spirit that, born with a woman's body into a heritage of rash and heedless men and seemingly for the sole purpose of cherishing those men to their early and violent ends, and this over a period of history which had seen brothers and husband slain in the same useless mischancing of human affairs; had seen, as in a nightmare not to be healed by either waking or sleep, the foundations of her life swept away and had her roots torn bodily from that soil where her forefathers slept trusting in the integrity of mankind-- a period at which the men themselves, for all their headlong and scornful rashness, would have quailed had their parts been passive parts and their doom been waiting. And she thought how much finer that gallantry which never lowered blade to foes no sword could find; that uncomplaining steadfastness of those unsung (ay, unwept too) women than the fustian and useless glamour of the men that obscured it. (357)

The ellipses in the following passage mark the deleted material:

B: And Narcissa would sit, ..., listening, admiring more than ever that indomitable spirit ... And she thought how much finer that gallantry...of those unsung (ay, unwept too) women than the fustian and useless glamour of the men that obscured it.

A word count performed on these two passages reveals that the finite clauses expand the main clause by 137 words--Passage A contains 179 words, and Passage B contains 42 words.

10. This effect occurred for me strongly and startlingly here, where Mrs. Compson has been nagging at Dilsey to take care of Ben before he wakes Jason:

"En who gwine eat yo messin?" Dilsey said. "Tell me dat. Go on now," she said, toiling upward. Mrs. Compson stood watching her as she mounted, steadying herself against the one hand, holding her skirts up with the other.

"Are you going to wake him up just to dress him?" she said.

Dilsey stopped. With her foot lifted to the next step she stood there, her hand against the wall and the gray splash of the window behind her, motionless and shapeless she loomed.

"He aint awake den?" she said.

"He wasnt when I looked in," Mrs. Compson said. "But it's past his time. He never does sleep after half past seven. You know he doesn't."

Dilsey said nothing. She made no further move, but though she could not see her save as a blobby shape without depth, Mrs. Compson knew that she had lowered her face a little and that she stood now like cows do in the rain, holding the empty water bottle by its neck. (271-272)

Far from indicating simple-mindedness and/or bestiality, as some have suggested, the objectivity and spareness of the style here allows unobstructed identification with Dilsey, as she stands half-way up the stairs, out of breath, contemplating for a moment the outrageous idiocy of the whitefolks she is bound to. I feel this identification in spite of the fact that the last sentence shifts the point of view closer to Mrs. Compson ("But though she [Mrs. Compson] could not see her save as a blobby shape without depth, Mrs. Compson knew...") so that Dilsey is only seen, and seen through the very source of her frustration.

11. This last effect reminds me of a phenomenon that Thomas Mann, in his Tales of Jacob, the first book in the Joseph and His Brothers tetralogy, has called "lunar syntax": a way of storytelling which speaks of the doings of ancestral figures as though they were done by the storyteller himself. In the following passage, Eleizer, the contemporary servant of Jacob, gets himself confused with the legendary servant of Abraham:

For instance, he had more than once told Joseph the tale of how he, among the kin of the family in Mesopotamia, had wooed Rebecca...for Isaac, told it down to the smallest detail...**just as though it had been his own experience.** Joseph listened with a pleasure in no way marred by the old man's syntactical idiosyncrasies, and certainly not by **the fact that the old man's ego was not quite clearly demarcated,** that it opened at the back, as it were, and overflowed into spheres external to his own individuality both in space and in time; **embodying in his own experience events which, remembered and related in the clear light of day, ought actually to have been put into the third person.** (77-78, emphasis added)

Faulkner's "syntactical idiosyncrasies" can have a similar effect, opening backwards or downwards to lend a wider significance to actions, characters, moments of experience.

Part 2

In Part 1 I suggested that the complexity of Faulkner's sentences is a function of his narrators' struggle with the paradox of having to try to close meaning by opening possibilities--by exploring, re-telling, and reconstructing Sutpen's history to get it to "settle". I characterized this exploratory, digressive syntax as "expansive", and found various means of achieving expansiveness in the novels preceding Absalom. In this section, I will isolate the appositive and the relative clause in Absalom and argue that their characteristic function is to repeat and at the same time elaborate on certain information. Further, the restrictive relative clause serves to presuppose the reader's knowledge of plot and character information so that the narrative proceeds through a largely achronological accretion of information. Finally, I will show that expansive syntax does not confound the forward movement of the story but creates opportunities for its advance. What follows, then, is a description of stylistic patterns. I defer discussion of the pragmatics of style--its meaning in terms of the problem of closure of meaning--to Part 3.

The appositive and relative clause patterns I am interested in can be found throughout the text, and my description of them will be focussed through a reading of Chapter 6, with brief excursions into earlier and later chapters. I have chosen Chapter 6, in which Shreve is introduced and the story of Sutpen's death and the arrival of Charles Etienne is recounted, because it is a good cross-section, containing typical features of the operation of the relative clause and appositive in the novel as a whole--recapitulating information, adding, exploring, and deepening new information, and motivating the forward movement of plot.

In Absalom, the reader often encounters long strings of appositional phrases depending from a single sentence. These long digressive appositions can be either a local phenomenon, occurring briefly, or they can have a much longer life, being

repeated across chapters. I begin my discussion of Absalom's distinctive syntax with a study of a typical use of both long- and short-term apposition in Chapter 6.

Apposition I: Local Color

The opening pages of Chapter 6 (pages 141-143) are controlled by a syntactical structure called (in traditional grammar) an **appositive**¹. We can see it at work in the first paragraph:

Then on the table before Quentin, lying on the open textbook beneath the lamp, the white oblong of envelope, the familiar blurred mechanical Jefferson Jan 10 1910 Miss. and then, opened, the My Dear Son 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 the strange room, across this strange iron New England snow.** (141, appositives in bold)

The first appositive, "that dead summer twilight..." is in apposition to the NP² "that dead dusty summer", repeating and expanding the NP through a second appositive, "--the wistaria, the cigar-smells, the fireflies--". It is the first in a persistent chain of appositives that is continued on page 142, immediately after Compson's letter, with "--[that dead dusty summer/his father's hand] bringing with it that very September evening itself" (142), which is in apposition to either "his father's hand" or "that dead dusty summer". After a long parenthetical, there is yet another appositive, beginning with the NP "--that very September evening". And it recurs still another time, on page 143: "--that evening, that twelve miles behind the fat mare in the moonless September dust...". His memory apparently stirred by the news of Rosa's death, Quentin continually returns to the evening he accompanied her to Sutpen's Hundred, the full narration of which is delayed until Chapter 9. When we look back at the chain of apposition, we can see that, despite interruption by a letter and a long parenthetical, the focus of the passage has remained stubbornly with a September

evening in a dead dusty summer. The narrative is moving through the continual reinstatement of appositives that repeat yet add to--and thus subtly modulate--the information about that evening, so that information accretes in layers around a single event³.

Another example of this kind of evolving appositive repetition can be found early in Chapter 5, in the variations on "Sutpen face":

Because it [Clytie's face] was not Henry's face. It was Sutpen face enough, but not his; **Sutpen coffee colored face** enough there in the dim light, barring the stairs: and I running out of the bright afternoon, into the thunderous silence of that brooding house where I could see nothing at first; then gradually the face, **the Sutpen face** not approaching, not swimming up out of the gloom, but already there, rocklike and firm and antedating time and house and doom and all, waiting there...--**the face without sex or age...: the same sphinx face...-- the face...**(109, appositive NP's in bold)

But in the paragraph which follows the one I have quoted from above, the appositive NP's related to "the face" transform themselves into appositive NP's related to "a profoundly attentive and distracted listening"(110), and "that which I believed I had come to find"(110):

I was crying not to someone, something, but...through something, through that force, **that furious yet absolutely rocklike and immobile antagonism which had stopped me--that presence, that familiar coffee-colored face, that body...**which...seemed to elongate and project upward something--not soul, not spirit, but something rather of a profoundly attentive and distracted listening to or for something which I myself could not hear and was not intended to hear--**a brooding awareness and acceptance...**which created postulated and shaped in the empty air between us that which I believed I had come to find...--**that bedroom long-closed and musty, that sheetless bed...**(110)

This use of apposition is frequent in Absalom: appositive NP's are followed by clause structures which generate new NP's that can themselves become appositives⁴. The appositive NP is capable of a process of evolution that provides Faulkner with enormous (infinite?) resources for exploring and expanding any NP.

Chapter 6 contains an example of another usage of the

appositive that Faulkner employs in Absalom:

--that scythe, symbolic laurel of a caesar's triumph--that rusty scythe loaned by the demon himself to Jones more than two years ago to cut the weeds away from the shanty doorway to smooth the path for rutting--that rusty blade garlanded with each successive day's gaudy ribbon or cheap bead for the (how did she put it? slut wasn't all, was it?) to walk in--that scythe beyond whose symbolic shape he, even though dead, even when earth itself declined any longer to bear his weight, jeered at her? (145)

This is all in apposition to NP "the scythe"(145). Faulkner reaches back into the preceding discourse to pick up an element of it for scrutiny and elaboration. It differs from the appositives around the September evening and the Sutpen face only in the brevity of its duration and the intensity of its focus: there are no digressive openings within it and it is not reinstated later on.

Apposition II: Eternal Recurrence

In the opening pages of Chapter 6, the NP's which the appositives depend from are variations on either "that dead summer twilight" or "that very September evening" until they are replaced by the NP+relative clause (see note 7 for a definition of relative clause) "something which he was unable to pass", which becomes the NP from which hangs still another appositive:

...that door, that gaunt tragic self-hypnotized youthful face like the tragedian in a college play, an academic Hamlet waked from some trancement of the curtain's falling and blundering across the dusty stage from which the rest of the cast had departed last commencement, the sister facing him across the wedding dress which she was not to use, not even to finish, the two of them slashing at one another with twelve or fifteen words and most of these the same words repeated two or three times so that when you boiled it down they did it with eight or ten.(142)

The door, the "gaunt tragic self-hypnotized youthful face", the sister and the brother--these are all things that Quentin is "unable to pass". But the information encoded in this appositive, unlike the short-lived appositives above which control the text locally but tend not to recur, has had a long career in the text; it contains phrases/images that have made earlier appearances in

much the same form, in this case, at the end of Chapter 5:

But Quentin was not listening, because this was also something which he too could not pass--**that door**, the running feet on the stairs beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot, the two women, the negress and **the white girl in her underthings (made of flour sacking when there had been flour, of window curtains when not) pausing, looking at the door, the yellowed creamy mass of old intricate satin and lace spread carefully on the bed and then caught swiftly up by the white girl and held before her as the door crashed in and the brother stood there, hatless, with his shaggy bayonet-trimmed hair, the gaunt worn unshaven face, his patched and faded grey tunic, the pistol still hanging against his flank: the two of them, brother and sister, curiously alike as if the difference in sex had merely sharpened the common blood to a terrific, an almost unbearable, similarity, speaking to one another in short brief staccato sentences like slaps, as if they stood breast to breast striking one another in turn, neither making any attempt to guard against the blows.**(139, passages in bold indicate information shared with 142)

These two passages are in apposition to almost identical NPs:

"something which he was still unable to pass"(142), and

"something which he too could not pass"(139). Quentin imagines the moment at the end of Chapter 5, then imagines it again at the beginning of Chapter 6, the details complementing each other, fleshing out the picture.

But we can trace at least part of the picture even farther back: part of this image is bequeathed to Quentin by Rosa, who did not see the confrontation of Henry and Judith but did witness its aftermath. An image of Judith which occurs in Rosa's narrative ("How I ran, fled up the stairs, and found no grieving widowed bride but Judith standing before the closed door to that chamber..."[114]) recurs twice: the phrase "...found her standing before that closed door which I was not to enter..."(121) is in apposition to the phrase "a woman standing calmly in a gingham dress before a closed door which she would not allow me to enter"(120). Out of these images, Quentin constructs the events that occurred before Rosa saw Judith. These enduring appositives become a kind of narrative currency, a stock of images and phrases traded among the narrators and developed and adapted

according to the knowledge and preoccupations of each narrator. They are never static: in this example, Quentin has reconstructed an event based on information provided by Rosa, and that reconstruction takes place before our eyes when we trace the history of the appositive structure.

Like the appositive, Absalom's relative clauses are sites at which phrases and images tend to recur and multiply in a digressive manner. The relative clause (more specifically, the restrictive relative) also plays a crucial role in the novel's information structure--what readers know and when. Faulkner uses the restrictive relative to present information as given, or known, and then repeats that information, varying it slightly, presenting it from different points of view, and adding to it, so that the fact that the plot emerges at all seems at times almost accidental to (or subservient to or in spite of) the brooding repetitive puzzling of the narrators. The site of this gradual accretion of plot information is the relative clause.

Relative Clauses I: Repetition

The focus on "that dead dusty summer" that is relentlessly recapitulated from the beginning of Chapter 6 is displaced by the parenthetical that begins on page 143, a parenthetical which contains the rest of the chapter⁵. The parenthetical begins with an appositive, and each subsequent paragraph is framed by a variation of it. Shreve's stuttering question on page 143 introduces the appositive that frames each paragraph up to and including page 147, and which is reasserted at the end of the chapter: "You mean that this old gal, this Aunt Rosa---"(143)⁶. This form begins each paragraph, and each paragraph ends with a question mark. The appositive (everything in the sentence after "You mean") plays the case role of direct object--it tells what Quentin meant.

But within the interrogative frame created by the appositive there is another linguistic structure which serves to summarize and confirm Shreve's understanding of the story thus far--the restrictive relative clause⁷. Because Shreve is saying back to

Quentin information Quentin has given him, many of the phrases and images contained in his speech have occurred before, many of them encoded in relative clauses, others not. Few of them, however, have the duration of the images and phrases around Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson, his house-building, his marriage, and the break-up of his family. When Shreve touches on this information in his summary, he changes very little:

["You mean"] That this Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub fled hiding from some momentary flashy glare of his creditors outraged face exasperated beyond all endurance, hiding, scuttling into respectability like a jackal into a rockpile so she thought at first until she realized that he was not hiding, did not want to hide, was merely engaged in one final frenzy of evil and harm-doing before the Creditor overtook him this next time for good and all;--this Faustus who appeared suddenly one Sunday with two pistols and twenty subsidiary demons and skuldugged a hundred miles of land out of a poor ignorant Indian and built the biggest house on it you ever saw and went away with six wagons and came back with the crystal tapestries and Wedgewood chairs to furnish it and nobody knew if he had robbed another steamboat or had just dug up a little more of the old loot, who hid horns and tail beneath human raiment and a beaver hat and chose (bought her, outswapped his father-in-law, wasn't it?) a wife after three years to scrutinize weigh and compare, not from one of the local ducal houses but from one of the lesser baronage whose principality was so far decayed that there would be no risk of his wife bringing him for dowry delusions of grandeur before he should be equipped for it yet not so far but that she might keep them both from getting lost among the new knives and forks and spoons that he had bought... (145, relative clauses in bold)

The passage begins with an appositive ("That this Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub..."), an element of which (the NP "this Faustus") is picked up and repeated as an appositive. But this second appositive contains a relative clause within it. In the relative clauses the details of Sutpen's arrival, house-building, and marriage accrete around the grammatical subject--"This Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub...this Faustus who...who...". Within the context of this passage, the relatives add information, charting Sutpen's career chronologically from his arrival in Jefferson to his marriage to Ellen Coldfield. We also notice that two of the three relative clauses in the passage

quoted above ("this Faustus who...who...") are (in traditional grammar) restrictive relative clauses--that is, they presuppose as known, rather than assert as new, the information contained within them. This is appropriate, since by this point in the novel we have heard this synopsis of the early phase of Sutpen's career numerous times; we may also recognize the fact that this synopsis was encoded in the relative clause very early in the novel. This recapitulation of information with variations and additions in appositives and relative clauses is one of the primary means by which Sutpen's story gets told.

Shreve's synopsis of the Sutpen story on page 145 is in fact the last of a long chain of synopses that have their root in a single image:

Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard, with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk upright like men, in attitudes wild and reposed, and manacled among them the French architect with his air grim, haggard, and tatteran...Then in the long unamaze 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 and clap them down like cards upon a table...(4)

Between the passage on page 4 and the passage on page 145 the same details are repeated in a pervasive relative clause structure. Though the passage on page 4 does not use the relative clause to encode the image of Sutpen, when we compare the passage on page 4 with a passage from page 5, we can see the details of page 4 being encoded in the relative clause, where they can be found from then on:

It seems that this demon--his name was Sutpen--(Colonel Sutpen)--Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation--(Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)--tore violently. And married her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter which--(Without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)--without gentleness. Which should have been the jewels of his pride and the shield and comfort of his old age, only--(Only they destroyed him or something or he destroyed them or

something. And died) --and died... (5)

Depending from the noun phrase (NP) "this demon" is a complex of appositives and a restrictive relative. The main verb in this sentence is, in fact, absent: after the dense "black hole" of apposition and relative clause modification, we never return to the main clause to complete it with a verb. This passage provides a snapshot of a typical usage of the relative clause in Absalom--repetition. The structure that I am calling the restrictive relative clause follows the NP "this demon". It is introduced by the relative pronoun "who", and identifies the "demon" as the man "who came out of nowhere...and built a plantation...and married her sister Ellen...and begot a son and a daughter which...". The activities of coming out of nowhere and building a plantation are repeated from page 4. New information is added too: we learn that he married "her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter". With the relative pronoun "which", the grammatical subject switches from "this demon" to "a son and a daughter" who "destroyed him or something or he destroyed them or something". With the addition of these facts the synopsis of the Sutpen story is complete, and is repeated as a relative clause on pages 7 and 10⁸.

Just as we saw on page 145, we can see the relative clauses in the passage on page 5 acting in an additive fashion: this is the demon, we are told, who a) "came out of nowhere", b) "built a plantation", c) "married her sister Ellen", etc. But when these same details are presented again on page 10 in the same syntactical form, can they still be said to be "additive"? Their status seems to have changed, moving from their origins as an additive mechanism to a "repetitive" mechanism. Similarly, when we return to page 145 we can see that Shreve has picked the synopsis up again and repeated it almost verbatim. When we looked at the passage on page 145 in isolation, we called its function "additive", too; now that we know its history and have observed its genesis in the first pages of the novel, it may be more accurate to call its function "repetitive": information inscribed

in the relative clause is recapitulated in the same shape over long stretches of text.

Repetitive phrases referring to Judith, Henry, and Mr. Coldfield are closely associated with the Sutpen synopsis, and occur in Shreve's repetitive relative clauses on pages 144 and 146. Though the reference to Mr. Coldfield on page 144 ("then her father nailed himself up in the attic to keep from being drafted into the Rebel army and starved to death...") is not itself a relative clause, the phrase, like the phrases that make up the Sutpen synopsis, does have a history of repetition as a restrictive relative clause:

...the father who, a conscientious objector on religious grounds, had starved to death in the attic of his own house, hidden (some said, walled up) there from Confederate provost marshal's men and fed secretly at night by this same daughter...(6)

...that man who was later to nail himself in his attic and starve to death...(47)

...the four years which she had spent feeding her father secretly at night while he hid from Confederate provost marshals...(53)

The phrase on page 146, "son fled for good now with a noose behind him and daughter doomed to spinsterhood", also has a history of repetition in the relative clause:

The nephew who served for four years in the same company with his sister's fiance and then shot the fiance to death before the gates to the house where the sister waited in her wedding gown on the eve of the wedding and then fled, vanished, none knew where.(6)

--the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride--(7)

the daughter who was already the same as a widow without ever having been a bride...and the son who had repudiated the very roof under which he had been born and to which he would return but once more before disappearing for good, and that as a murderer and almost a fratricide(10)

son fled to Texas or California or maybe even South America, daughter doomed to spinsterhood...(147)

son gone, vanished...daughter doomed to spinsterhood who had chosen spinsterhood already...(148)

the woman who had been widowed before she had been a bride(167)

When repeated across long stretches of text, the restrictive relative clauses operate almost like epithets, recurring with little change and becoming indissolubly linked to the NP's they modify.

Relative Clauses II: Presupposition

A feature of Absalom that causes first- (and sometimes second- and third-) time readers of the novel tremendous difficulty is Faulkner's use of the restrictive relative clause to refer to characters or events that have not been previously introduced or described. Chapter 6 provides an excellent example of the way in which presupposition in the restrictive relative clause introduces the reader to material which is necessary to the movement of the narration locally but which is not yet ready to be narrated chronologically--that is, material which is necessary for understanding a current problem often introduces additional information about characters and events readers have yet to encounter, pulling information out of its chronological order and presenting it as known.

In Chapter 6 we learn how Sutpen dies, but the reason for his murder is, at this point, less than clear:

So that Sunday morning came and the demon up and away before dawn, Judith thinking she knew why since that morning the black stallion which he rode to Virginia and led back had a son born on his wife Penelope, only it was not that foal which the demon had got up early to look at and it was almost a week before they caught, found, the old negress, the midwife who was squatting beside the quilt pallet that dawn while Jones sat on the porch where the rusty scythe had leaned for two years, so that she could tell how she heard the horse and then the demon entered and stood over the pallet with the riding whip in his hand and looked down at the mother and child and said, "Well, Milly, too bad you're not a mare like Penelope. Then I could give you a decent

stall in the stable" and turned and went out and the old negress squatted there and heard them, the voices, he and Jones: "Stand back. Don't you touch me, Wash"--"I'm going to tech you, Kernel" and she heard the whip too though not the scythe, no whistling air, no blow, nothing, since that which merely consummates punishment evokes a cry while that which evokes the last silence occurs in silence. (150-151)

Faulkner uses a restrictive relative clause to identify "the old negress, the midwife" as the woman who heard the words that drove Wash to murder. The restrictive relative clause (as well as other details, ie the use of the demonstrative determiner in "that Sunday morning" and "that dawn") presupposes our knowledge of not only the midwife, but of what she saw and heard as well. Yet this is our first encounter with the scene.

It is not completely accurate, however, to say that the means and circumstances of Sutpen's murder are new to us: if we have been paying attention, we will recall that certain details of the scene had been obliquely and quickly referred to previously. There are the obvious ones: "the rusty scythe" is the focus of a long appositive digression a few pages previous; the fact that the baby is Sutpen's has been suggested in the restrictive relatives describing Jones ("who at the demon's command removed with his own hand...from the showcase the very beads and ribbons, measured the very cloth from which Judith...helped the granddaughter to fashion a dress to walk past the lounging men in, the side-looking and the tongues, until her increasing belly taught her embarrassment--or perhaps fear"[149]) and in Shreve's interrogative appositives. But perhaps the baldest and most obvious allusion to this moment is, when we first encounter it in Rosa's narrative in chapter 5, almost incomprehensible:

--that brute progenitor of brutes [Wash] whose granddaughter was to supplant me, if not in my sister's house at least in my sister's bed...--that brute who (brute instrument of that justice which presides over human events which, incept in the individual, runs smooth, less claw than velvet: but which, by man or woman flouted, drives on like fiery steel and overrides both weakly just and unjust strong, both vanquisher and innocent victimized, ruthless for appointed

right and truth) brute who was not only to preside upon the various shapes and avatars of Thomas Sutpen's devil's fate but was to provide at the last the female flesh in which his name and lineage should be sepulchred... (107)

Notice the restrictive relatives again, presupposing our knowledge of Jones as Sutpen's nemesis before we know how or why. None of this is very detailed as to the means and circumstances of Sutpen's death, yet when we finally do get the scene of his murder itself in the midwife's story on page 151, it is presented as if we already knew its details.

Faulkner's use of the restrictive relative clause to presuppose certain information, as described above, allows information to accrete piecemeal around a character or event until he is ready to tell that story from its beginning, and this is what happens with the story of Sutpen's murder in Chapter 7. Chapter 7 repeats information about the relationship between Sutpen and Wash and Sutpen's murder that was originally encoded in restrictive relative clauses in Chapter 6 (and in certain cases even farther back)⁹. But where Chapter 6 describes the relationship between Sutpen and Wash and Wash's murder of Sutpen in three pages (149-151) Chapter 7 takes nine pages to tell the same story (225-234). In addition to the material carried over from Chapter 6 and repeated, new information and more detail have been added, most notably as a result of a shift of perspective towards Wash that describes his thoughts before he kills Sutpen (226-228). In Chapter 7 the midwife's story is related in much the same way as in Chapter 6¹⁰, but with more detail about Sutpen's response to the news of the baby's gender. And after the midwife's story, Quentin goes back in time to the moment of the baby's birth, and tells the story yet again, from Wash's perspective, forward from that point.

By the end of Chapter 7, then, we have heard the story of Sutpen's murder three times: the first time we hear it the relative clauses work to tell it as if we already knew it, the second telling repeats the first but adds detail, and the third presents it from the perspective of the murderer. The remarkable

point is that, in terms of what we know and when we learn it, Faulkner has the information back-to-front. The same thing happens between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2: Chapter 1 presents Sutpen's story--through the extensive use of relative clauses--as known, but Chapter 2 begins on the day of Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson and tells the story of his house-building and marriage in the correct chronological sequence, without making use of the relative clause. These are only two examples of a use (and strategic non-use) of the relative clause that is pervasive, constituting an important element of the reader's experience of Absalom.

Digressive Syntax and the Dynamics of Narrative Progress

I have artificially separated the functions of Faulkner's appositives and relative clauses in order to make a distinction between repetition--which is accomplished through the use of relatives and appositives--and presupposition, which occurs with the restrictive relative clause. In fact, repetition and presupposition, appositives and relatives, are found side by side, working together within paragraphs and sentences to create the expansive, digressive feeling that is characteristic of the novel. Absalom's a-chronological and non-linear structure arises from its a-chronological, non-linear syntax, its repetitiveness and convoluted information structure. But contrary to what we might expect, the digressive nature of the grammar does not stall the narrative--in fact, new narrative tacks are discovered in the descent into appositives and relative clauses, which are fertile story-beds that energize the imaginations of the narrators. This paradox--that forward movement can arise from the lateral or even backwards movement created by digressive syntax--is exemplified in Chapter 6 in the story of Charles Etienne's arrival at Sutpen's Hundred.

We can see in the following passage a use of appositives that is familiar to us now:

Your grandfather saw it; that was the year Judith sold the store and your grandfather attended to it for her and he had

ridden out to see her about the matter and he witnessed it: **the interlude, the ceremonial widowhood's bright dramatic pageantry**. He didn't know at the time how the octoroon came to be here, how Judith could even have known about her to write her where Bon was dead. But there she was, with the eleven-year-old boy who looked more like eight. It must have resembled a garden scene by the Irish poet, Wilde: **the late afternoon, the dark cedars with the level sun in them, even the light exactly right and the graves, the three pieces of marble (your grandfather had advanced Judith the money to buy the third stone with against the price of the store) looking as though they had been cleaned and polished and arranged by scene shifters who with the passing of twilight would return and strike them and carry them, hollow fragile and without weight, back to the warehouse until they should be needed again; the pageant, the scene, the act, entering upon the stage--**(157, appositives in bold)

Two sets of appositives define the "it" that grandfather saw: "the interlude, the ceremonial widowhood's bright dramatic pageantry", and "the pageant, the scene, the act, entering upon the stage". The second of these two appositives is invoked after the phrases in apposition to the NP+prep p "a garden scene by the Irish poet, Wilde", which literally "set the scene" for this "pageant". Though the garden scene is also part of what grandfather saw, the return of the appositives around the pageant tells us that the pageant is to be the center of what grandfather saw.

But if we are looking for an indication of **what** is done at the graveside, we must search for it among the expansive description of **who** is doing it:

---the magnolia-faced woman a little plumper now, a woman created of by and for darkness whom the artist Beardsley might have dressed, in a soft flowing gown designed not to infer bereavement or widowhood but to dress some interlude of slumbrous and fatal insatiation, of passionate and inexorable hunger of the flesh, walking beneath a lace parasol and followed by a bright gigantic negress carrying a silk cushion and leading by the hand the little boy whom Beardsley might not only have dressed but drawn--a thin delicate child with a smooth ivory sexless face who, after his mother handed the negress the parasol and took the cushion and knelt beside the grave and arranged her skirts and wept, never released the negress' apron but stood blinking quietly who, having been born and lived all his life in a kind of silken prison lighted by perpetual shaded

candles, breathing for air the milklike and absolutely physical lambence which his mother's days and hours emanated, had seen little enough of sunlight before, let alone out-of-doors, trees and grass and earth; and last of all, the other woman, Judith (*who, bereaved, did not need to mourn* Quentin thought, thinking *Yes, I have had to listen too long*) who stood just inside the cedars, in the calico dress and sunbonnet to match it, both faded and shapeless--the calm face, the hands which could plow or cut wood and cook and weave cloth folded before her, standing in the attitude of an indifferent guide in a museum, waiting, probably not even watching. (157-158)

This combination of appositives and restrictive relative clauses works to obscure the actions of the characters. The what-is-done, the rather slight action around the grave, is nearly buried in a deep stack of apposition and relative clauses that foreground and contemplate the doers.

The syntax, then, creates a situation in which plot, action, is consistently interrupted by the digressive drops into apposition and relative clauses. But it is also in the interruption that action is re-invigorated. This paradox is illustrated by a part of the paragraph that follows the paragraph discussed above. Arising out of a focus on the the way in which Bon's mistress (the "octoroon") "passed the rest of the week" (158) after her visit to Bon's grave, the introduction of Clytie sparks a long digression:

She [the octoroon] stayed a week. She passed the rest of that week in the one remaining room in the house whose bed had linen sheets...--that room airless and shuttered, impregnated behind the sagging closed blinds with the heavy fainting odor of...the crystal phial which the negress alternated with the fan as she sat beside the bed between trips to the door to receive the trays which Clytie carried up the stairs--Clytie, who did that fetching and carrying as Judith made her, who must have perceived whether Judith told her or not that it was another negro whom she served, yet who served the negress just as she would quit the kitchen from time to time and search the rooms downstairs until she found that little strange lonely boy sitting quietly in a straight hard chair in the dim and shadowy library or parlor, with his four names and his sixteenth-part black blood and his expensive esoteric Fauntleroy clothing who regarded with an aghast fatalistic terror the grim coffee-colored woman who would come on bare feet to the door and

look in at him, who gave him not teacakes but the coarsest cornbread spread with as coarse molasses (this surreptitiously, not that the mother or the duenna might object, but because the household did not have food for eating between meals), gave it to him, thrust it at him with restrained savageness, and who found him one afternoon playing with a negro boy about his own size in the road outside the gates and cursed the negro child out of sight with level and deadly violence and sent him, the other, back to the house in a voice the very absence from which of vituperation or rage made it seem just that much more deadly and cold. (158)

The part of this paragraph that interests me is the appositive in apposition to the phrase "the trays which Clytie carried up the stairs". The proper noun "Clytie" is picked up for apposition and restriction through the relative clause. Clytie shares the position of the grammatical subject of the relative clauses with "that little strange lonely boy". But what Clytie and the boy do is part of a larger structure--the relative clause--which has as its primary function the modification of nouns. So within what seems to be a stall on the surface of the text, a list of clauses defining Clytie as the doer of certain activities that delay the usual what-happens-next? progression of plot, there is a description of Charles Etienne's first experience of the people who will become his only family. And many of the clauses defining Clytie and the boy recur through the remainder of Chapter 6, so that the syntax that seems to delay the forward progress of story actually generates the new material that makes that progress possible. Each time the information about Clytie and Charles Etienne is repeated, it is repeated with a difference: the repetition **modulates** the description in a way that retains a connection to earlier mentions but also creates difference, a process that saves Absalom from narrative stasis--it is this difference, created through repetition, that moves the story forward¹¹.

Endnotes

1. The grammatical term "appositive" requires an explanation in terms of its syntactical function and in terms of its rhetorical function. First, syntax.

According to Quirk et al (note: in the examples that follow, the appositives are underlined and taken from Quirk), "two or more phrases are in apposition when they have identity of reference [ie refer to the same person or thing]. The appositives may be juxtaposed [ie "A professional singer, someone trained in Paris, had been engaged for the concert"] or separated [ie "His birthday present lay on the table, a book on ethics, the work of his professor"] without formal expression of their relationship; or the apposition may be indicated by a conjunction [ie "Linguistics or the study of language attracts many students"] or by forms such as "that" or "namely" [ie "The outcome, that is her re-election..."]. Particularly [in the last two examples] we see that apposition often includes an explanatory paraphrase" (Student Grammar 382).

Further, appositives "may belong to the same general syntactic class (eg the central type noun phrase + noun phrase [see below for an explanation of the noun phrase]) as in 'Football, his only interest in life, has brought him many friends'". But they may also be from different syntactic classes, "for example, noun phrase + ing-clause in 'His only interest in life, playing football, has brought him many friends'" (Comprehensive Grammar 1303).

The equivalency of reference between apposed units is highlighted by the fact that many appositives can be linked by the forms of "be" (Comprehensive Grammar 1301). This demonstrates a copular relationship: "A professional singer **is** someone trained in Paris"; "His birthday present **was** a book on ethics"; "a book on ethics **is** the work of his professor", etc.

Besides this re-naming or equating function, appositives may also "repeat as the noun head a word or morphological variant of the word" (Comprehensive Grammar 1119), as in "She expressed her belief in the economic recovery of the country, a belief that was well founded".

These are the forms of apposition that interest me most in Absalom--appositives that equate or re-name and which pick up and repeat a noun phrase. Rhetorically, Halliday sees these forms of apposition functioning as a means of elaboration:

In ELABORATION, one clause elaborates on the meaning of another by further specifying or describing it. The secondary clause does not introduce a new element into the picture but rather provides a further characterization of one that is already there, restating it, clarifying it, refining it, or adding a descriptive attribute or comment. (203)

Faulkner's appositives do all of these things--restate, clarify, refine, or add to existing knowledge. What is remarkable about his

use of appositives is the **extremity** of the restatement, of clarification, of refinement, etc. In Part 3, I will argue that this extremity results from his attempt to understand and close (that is, cease to be compelled to narrate) the history of Sutpen, the South, and America.

2. NP is the standard abbreviation for the grammatical term "noun phrase". "A noun phrase", according to Cook and Suter, "is a grammatical class consisting of a noun (or pronoun) and any immediate modifiers"(35). The "head" of the NP can be a noun, pronoun, or be from another class, such as quantifiers or verbs. Modifiers can come before the head of the noun phrase: these are predeterminers (words like all, both, half, twice, one-third, etc) determiners (definite and indefinite articles, demonstratives, pronouns, possessive pronouns, quantifiers, etc) postdeterminers (cardinal and ordinal numbers), and premodifiers (typically adjectives and adjective phrases, but includes words from other grammatical classes as well).

Modifiers can also come after the head-- these are postmodifiers, a class that includes appositives, relative clauses, and prepositional phrases (abbreviated as prep p. here), to name a few. A noun phrase can consist of simply the head ("boys", "cars") or be a complex of any of the components listed above.

Schematically, the NP looks like this (the /0 sign indicates that the modifier may or may not be present in a noun phrase):

NP= {predeterminer/0}+{Determiner/0}+{postdeterminer/0}
+{premodifier/0}+head+{postmodifier/0}

A "fully loaded" noun phrase, containing all the categories of modifier, might be "All the first four savage monsters in his head who kept him awake".

3. Though there are numerous additional examples of this grammatical feature, perhaps the most striking occurs in chapter 3:

He [Sutpen] probably did not even look at her [Rosa] twice as compared with, weighed against, his own family and children-- **the small slight child...**;--**this creature, this face...**;--**this small body...**: **that aura of a creature...**--**this bound maidservant...**--**the face...** (51, NP's in apposition in bold)

This looks slightly less impressive out of context, but when we realize that the distance between the first appositive NP-- "the small slight child"-- and the second --"this creature, this face"-- is almost half a page (and is a single sentence), we get a sense of how much story-telling occurs within these appositive expansions of narrative.

4. Another example can be found in the gorgeous, evocative appositives describing Bon's "exposure" of Henry to the decadent mysteries of New Orleans:

I can imagine how he did it--the calculation, the surgeon's alertness and cold detachment, the exposures brief...the plate unaware of what the complete picture would show, scarce seen yet ineradicable:--a trap, a riding horse standing before a closed and curiously monastic doorway in a neighbourhood a little decadent, even a little sinister, and Bon mentioning the owner's name casually--this, corruption subtly anew by putting into Henry's mind the notion of one man of the world speaking to another...;--a facade shuttered and blank, drowsing in steamy morning sunlight...

....

Without his knowing what he saw it was as though to Henry the blank and scaling barrier in dissolving produced and revealed not comprehension to the mind...but striking straight and true to some primary blind and mindless foundation of all young male living dream and hope--a row of faces like a bazaar of flowers, the supreme apotheosis of chattelry, of human flesh bred of the two races for that sale--a corridor of doomed and tragic flower faces walled between the grim duenna row of old women and the elegant shapes of young men trim predatory and...goatlike...(88-89, appositives in bold)

5. This is the most extreme example of a syntactical resource Faulkner uses quite often. Like the relative clause and the appositive, the parenthetical functions as a means of digression and expansion, though I cannot detect a pattern in the use of the parenthetical that would indicate why it is chosen over the relative or the appositive in a given situation.

6. This form of apposition bears a superficial resemblance to the relative clause, but differs in some important ways. Though the appositive, like the restrictive relative, is capable of introduction by "that", it differs in that (and I quote from Quirk et al) "the particle 'that' is not an element in the clause structure (functioning as subject, object, etc, as it must in the relative clause) but a conjunction"(1260). Also, "the head of the noun phrase must be a general abstract noun such as fact, idea, proposition, reply, remark, answer, and the like"(1260). Appositives are also capable of being linked with the forms of "be", while relative clauses are not. Thus, while the appositive itself in Shreve's question plays the role of direct object--it tells what Quentin meant--the particle 'that' itself plays no case role.

7. Like the appositive, the restrictive relative clause requires a grammatical and a rhetorical definition.

Relative clauses are a form of noun phrase postmodification. They are usually (but not necessarily) introduced by the relative pronouns *that*, *which*, *who*, etc. But unlike the appositive, in the relative clause the relative pronoun must play a case role in the sentence or in the relative clause itself. That is, it must function as subject, object, complement, or adverbial. For example, in the sentence "they are delighted with the person who has been appointed", the relative pronoun "who" is the subject of the relative clause in that it identifies the person who "they are delighted with". In the sentence, "they are delighted with the person that we have appointed", the relative pronoun "that" is the direct object of the verb "appointed", in that it tells us who got appointed.

Relative clauses can be either restrictive or nonrestrictive:

The modification is RESTRICTIVE when the reference of the head is a member of a class which can be identified only through the modification that has been supplied...Alternatively, the referent of a noun phrase may be viewed as unique or as a member of a class that has been independently identified (for example in the preceding context). Any modification given to such a head is additional information which is not essential for identification, and we call it NONRESTRICTIVE. (Comprehensive Grammar 1239)

The difference between restrictive and nonrestrictive relative clauses is often a matter of punctuation. In the sentence "the child, who was born yesterday, is doing fine", the relative clause, "who was born yesterday", is set off by commas to indicate that it is extra, incidental, information, and not necessary for identifying the entity referred to by the NP "the child". The relative clause is, therefore, nonrestrictive. Remove the commas and you have a restrictive relative clause: "the child who was born yesterday is doing fine". In this case the relative clause is restrictive in that it differentiates the child who was born yesterday from children born last week, a month ago, two years ago, etc.

It is also possible to drop the relative pronoun from a relative clause: we can say "the person who is writing reports is my colleague", but we can also say "the person writing reports is my colleague". Similarly, we can drop the relative pronoun from "the book that I bought..." to get "the book I bought...". These are known in traditional grammar as "reduced relatives".

Rhetorically, Halliday sees the relative clause as an "embedded clause" that expands the meaning of that which it modifies:

The meaning of an embedded clause, or phrase, that is functioning as an expansion is essentially to define, delimit, or specify. Thus the characteristic embedded expansion is the

"defining relative clause" (also called "restrictive")...Its function is to specify which member or members of the class designated by the head noun...is or are being referred to. (220)

Halliday suggests that "the typical [restrictive] relative clause, introduced by who, which, that...is," like the appositive, "elaborating in sense. The relative element [the relative pronoun] in the embedded clause restates the nominal antecedent; thus in 'the man who came to dinner stayed a month', the man who came to dinner and the man who stayed a month are the same man" (220-221). While the restrictive relative restates and restricts the reference of the NP it modifies, it also **assumes as known** the information it contains, where the nonrestrictive relative **asserts as new** the information it contains.

Together, the relative clause and the appositive provide Faulkner with the syntactical tools to elaborate and expand. Again, the remarkable thing about Faulkner's use of these resources is the extremity of the elaboration and expansion.

8. Faulkner's use of the relative clause tends to minimize the differences between the different narrators' "voices". We can see this through a comparison of the unnamed narrator's transformation of the Sutpen story described above and the transformation of the Sutpen story that occurs in Rosa's narrative in chapter 1.

The opening of Rosa's narrative repeats much of the information given to us by the unnamed narrator on pages 4 and 5, but it is not encoded in relative clauses:

He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman. He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name which nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own anymore than the horse was his own or even the pistols, seeking someplace to hide himself, and Yoknapatawpha County supplied him with it. He sought the guarantee of reputable men to barricade him from the other and later strangers who might come seeking him in turn, and Jefferson gave him that. Then he needed respectability, the shield of a virtuous woman, to make his position impregnable even against the men who had given him protection... (9)

We recognize the details from the unnamed narrator's synopsis, but they are not repeated in relative clauses here. Rosa does, however, make her own syntactical transformation, one that is identical to the unnamed narrator's syntactical transformation on page 5 (restrictive relative clauses in bold):

...--a man who so far as anyone (including the father who was to give him a daughter in marriage) knew either had no past at all or did not dare to reveal it--a man who rode into town out of nowhere with a horse and two pistols and a herd of wild beasts...and that French architect...a man who fled here and

hid, concealed himself behind respectability, behind that hundred mile of land which he took from a tribe of ignorant indians, nobody knows how, and a house the size of a courthouse... (10-11)

The details here are recapitulated with very little to distinguish them from the "voice" of the unnamed narrator. When we consider Shreve's recapitulation of this information we can see that Absalom's "transindividual voice" exists largely in the relative clause.

9. Because the recapitulative tendencies of Faulkner's relative clauses and appositives have already been demonstrated with regard to the Sutpen synopsis and related material, the following is only a partial list of recapitulated material regarding Jones and Sutpen: my purpose is to show how, in an effort to tell the whole story of Sutpen's murder, chapter 7 repeats and adds to information we already possess.

The phrase/image from chapter 7 is given first, followed by the phrase/image it is derived from in chapter 6. Notice that in all but one of the passages from chapter 7 the relative clause is absent: even though the information has been repeated, Faulkner asserts the information rather than assume it shared, as he did in chapter 6.

"And maybe [it was] Wash...that after he [Sutpen] went away with the regiment would tell folks that he (Wash) was looking after Kernel's place and niggers until after a while maybe he even believed it" (225) : "this Jones who after the demon rode away with the regiment when the granddaughter was only eight years old would tell people that he 'was lookin' after Major's place and niggers' even before they had time to ask him why he was not with the troops and perhaps in time came to believe the lie himself"(150)

"And he was still carrying fish and animals he killed (or maybe stole) and vegetables up to the house when that was about all Mrs. Sutpen and Judith (and Clytie too) had to live on, and Clytie would not let him come into the kitchen with the basket even"(226) : "---Jones who before '61 had not even been allowed to approach the front of the house and who during the next four years got no nearer that the kitchen door and that only when he brought the game and fish and vegetables on which the seducer's-to-be wife and daughter (and Clytie too...) depended on to keep life in them"(149)

"But they would drink together under the scuppernong arbor on the Sunday afternoons" (226) : "(...Jones...who in the old days, the old dead Sunday afternoons of monotonous peace which they spent beneath the scuppernong arbor in the backyard, the demon lying in a hammock while Jones squatted against a post, rising from time to time to pour for the demon from the

demijohn and the bucket of spring water which he had fetched from the spring more than a mile away then squatting again, chortling and chuckling...)"(149)

"he would see Sutpen (the fine figure of the man as he called it) on the black stallion, galloping about the plantation..."(226) : "--blind Jones who apparently saw still in that furious lecherous wreck the old fine figure of the man who once galloped on the black thoroughbred about that domain two boundaries of which the eye could not see from any point"(150)

10. "Then about a week later they caught the nigger, the midwife, and she told how..."(229) : "...it was almost a week before they caught, found, the old negress, the midwife...so that she could tell how..."(150-151)

11. To see this, compare the passages that follow to the passage I have been discussing: each of these has at least one element--image, lexis, phrase--that corresponds to an element in the "seed" passage on page 158. But notice the additions too, which aid in advancing the story of the relationship between Clytie and Charles Etienne.

---Clytie who had never been further from Sutpen's Hundred than Jefferson in her life, yet who made that journey alone to New Orleans and returned with the child, the boy of twelve now and looking ten, in one of the outgrown Fauntleroy suits but with a new oversize overall jumper coat which Clytie had bought for him...(159)

---Yes, sleeping in the trundle bed beside Judith's, beside that of the woman who looked upon him and treated him with a cold unbending detached gentleness more discouraging than the fierce ruthless constant guardianship of the negress who, with a sort of invincible spurious humility, slept on a pallet on the floor...(160)

...the woman on the pallet upon whom he had already come to look as might some delicate talonless and fangless wild beast crouched in its cage in some hopeless and desperate similitude of ferocity...might look upon the human creature who feeds it, who fed him, thrust food which he himself could discern to be the choicest of what they had, food which he realized had been prepared for him by deliberate sacrifice, with that curious blend of savageness and pity, of yearning and hatred...(160-161)

---the boy with his light bones and womanish hands struggling...while Clytie watched, never out of sight of him, with that brooding fierce unflagging jealous care, hurrying

out whenever anyone white or black stopped in the road as if to wait for the boy to complete the furrow and pause long enough to be spoken to, sending the boy on with a single quiet word or even gesture a hundred times more more fierce than the level murmur of vituperation with which she drove the passerby on... (162)

---a boy seen always near the house with Clytie always nearby, then a youth learning to plow and Clytie somewhere nearby too and it soon well known with what grim and unflagging alertness she discovered and interrupted any attempt to speak to him... (163)

The process is almost sedimentary (and, some might say, takes about as long) in the way that new information is carried along in the stream of repeated information, depositing new knowledge in the already established bed of the reader's memory.

Part 3

Absalom contains two types of metatextual reflection on its own ambitions. The first type explains the repetitive appositives and relative clauses: narrators are described as speaking with "grim haggard amazed"(3) voices; they speak with "incredulous and unbearable amazement"(9) and "with...overtone[s] of sullen bemusement, of smouldering outrage"(177); Sutpen relates his own story to General Compson with "patient amazed recapitulation"(212) and "sober and quiet bemusement"(219) as he attempts to figure out the flaw in his design. Amazement, incredulity, and outrage are, in this novel, encoded in the appositives and relative clauses that repeat yet add to and subtly modulate information throughout the text. The second type of metatextual reflection explains the exploration, expansion, and digression achieved by the syntax: Quentin and Shreve are described as "creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere"(243); they are engaged in "hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true or fit the preconceived"(253), a task which seems to require the rigorous testing of hypotheses from several angles which in turn necessitates expansive syntax, as each narrator seizes a character or event and subjects it to renaming and expansion, the rhetorical function of appositives and relative clauses respectively. And finally, perhaps the most often quoted reflection on the novel's narrative explains the link between the repetitiveness and expansiveness of the grammar:

It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they don't explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sound to us like Sanskrit or Choctaw;...Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters

from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (80)

This has been read as a commentary on the activity of fiction-making itself, which, as it manifests itself in Absalom, is a repetitive process of tedious and intent accounting, making sure no fact has been overlooked, as the narrators, like Sutpen himself, try to make an acceptable (ie bearable) meaning for the story. The facts are assembled into meaningful patterns over and over again, but no single construction is fully satisfactory. In these ways, Absalom explains its own style.

There is a consequence of this style, however, that can lead us to a less poetic but more critically satisfying understanding of the meaning of Absalom's syntax: repetition and digression create problems in cohesion¹. In Part 2 I showed that the restrictive relative clause often presupposes the reader's familiarity with characters and events that have not been previously introduced or described: pragmatically, this causes a cohesive rupture in the text; the reader is not given the material to interpret the reference until chronological storytelling reasserts itself. Compounding this cohesive warp is the tendency of appositives and relative clauses to wander away from the noun phrases they depend from, which also strains cohesiveness by obscuring the thematic focus of a given passage². A comparison of Absalom and Light in August in terms of cohesion, which will be the work of this chapter, shows that Absalom's struggle to cohere is a function of its struggle to mean, to construct and establish a truth its narrators can live with. The investigation that follows will focus on two acts of

remembering, one from Light in August (the story of Joe Christmas's conception and birth [Light in August, 350-365]), and one from Absalom (the first two pages of Rosa Coldfield's narrative in the first chapter of Absalom). In both cases the narrators have firsthand knowledge of the stories they relate; they do not need to reconstruct events from limited evidence. Yet only the story from Light in August achieves cohesiveness while the story from Absalom delays it, demonstrating Absalom's struggle to find the meaning its narrators desperately desire.

I

Light in August, which follows Sanctuary and precedes Absalom, presents a paradox. Though the omniscient narrative voice plays a much larger role than in Absalom, often taking over a narrative from another character (Joanna's story is told this way), like Absalom, much of the story is told through embodied voices: by "the town", by Byron Bunch, by Joanna Burden, by Gavin Stevens, by Doc and Mrs. Hines. Yet the style employed in the service of this differs completely from Absalom. It is often the simple style of legend or folk tale (Lena) or family history (Hightower and Joanna). Take, for example, the story of Lena's origins:

When she was twelve years old her mother and father died in the same summer, in a log house of three rooms and a hall, without screens, in a room lighted by a bugswirled kerosene lamp, the naked floor worn smooth as old silver by naked feet. She was the youngest living child. Her mother died first. She said, "Take care of paw." Lena did so. Then one day her father said, "You go to Doane's Mill with Mckinley. You get ready to go, be ready when he comes." Then he died. Mckinley, the brother, arrived in a wagon. They buried the father in a grove behind a country church one afternoon, with a pine headstone. (2)

With the exception of the expansive first sentence, the facts of her young life are related very simply. Faulkner is also careful to insure that the reader is properly introduced to his characters in this novel: early in the novel, when Faulkner needs to introduce Joanna Burden, he includes enough information so

that we get an immediate and ominous sense of who she is and the import of her relationship with Joe Christmas:

She lives in the big house alone, a woman of middleage. She has lived in the house since she was born, yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner whose people moved in from the North during Reconstruction. A Yankee, a lover of negroes, about whom in town there is still talk of queer relations with negroes in the town and out of it, despite the fact that it is now sixty years since her grandfather and her brother were killed on the square by an exslaveowner over a question of negro votes in a state election. But it still lingers about her and about the place: something dark and outlandish and threatful, even though she is but a woman and but the descendant of them whom the ancestors of the town had reason (or thought they had) to hate and dread. But it is there: the descendants of both in their relationship to one another ghosts, with between them the phantom of the old spilled blood and the old horror and anger and fear. (42)

At times I crave this kind of simplicity in Absalom: this character, introduced here for the first time, is assumed to be unfamiliar to the reader, an assumption that Absalom almost never makes. And while Faulkner does use the appositive and relative clause, they do not expand within the sentence to anywhere near the degree they do in Absalom.

Why? Why, in the midst of a novel that, like Absalom, contains so much remembering and re-telling and family history (as in the passage just cited), does the writing lack the expansiveness of the book that follows it, a book which also consists of remembering, retelling, and family history? The answer is in Absalom's representation of a failure to find a satisfactory solution to the conundrums of past events, in its concern with the failure to close or complete or to circumscribe the narrative. These do not seem to be problematical for Light'. The various histories related in the novel ultimately explain Joe's murder of Joanna and his death at the hands of Percy Grimm, and the **meaning** of those histories do not seem to be in dispute; history does not obsess. History in Absalom not only does not

*From this point forward, Light in August will be abbreviated to Light.

explain itself, it won't lie still, refusing to be past, to be resolved into meaning and finished with, and erupts obtrusively and persistently into the present of its inheritors. The forces that conspire to kill Joe Christmas are socio-historical-religious ones, but their meaning, effect, and aetiology seem to be beyond question. History is a known quantity that does not seem to require reconstruction, only remembering³. Or perhaps it is simply that the reconstruction is not the focus of attention, that we are being invited to see through the construct and into its significance, its meaning, while in Absalom the anxiety seems to be around the fact that the construction, the exploration, is all that there is, and that when it is achieved it's too hideous or unbelievable to accept or contemplate and so must be taken down and constructed anew. Light lacks Absalom's anxiety over closure.

There is an important structural similarity between the two novels that highlights the remarkable absence in Light of the features of expansiveness that dominate Absalom while possibly instructing us as to the reason for this difference: both novels make use of the same technique for framing storytelling⁴.

Compare this, from Light,

He ceases. At once the woman begins to speak, as though she has been waiting with rigid impatience for Byron to cease. She speaks in the same dead, level tone: the two voices in monotonous strophe and antistrophe: two bodiless voices recounting dreamily something performed in a region without dimension by people without blood: "I laid across the bed..." (355-356)

with this, from Absalom:

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

were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least, to Shreve) shades too) quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporising breath. The chimes now began to ring for midnight, melodious slow and faint beyond the closed, the snow-sealed, window. "---the old Sabine..."(243)

Both moments occur at a break in the storytelling; in both cases there is antagonistic collaboration; both speakers are rehearsing past events, Shreve in 1910 speaking of events that may have occurred just prior to 1860, and Mrs. Hines speaking of events that occurred slightly more than thirty years prior to the moment of speaking; and both speakers speak of "ghosts". With all of these consistencies between the texts, we might expect similar styles of telling. But it is just here that the most important difference occurs: Mrs. Hines is speaking of events she has experienced and people she has known **as if** they were ghosts, "people without blood", while Shreve is in fact speaking about ghosts, about the shades of shades, about people and events that not only **he** has never known or experienced, but who his **ancestors** did not know or experience either. The difference between the two speakers is in the kind of fictionalizing they have to do--Mrs. Hines is involved in the ordinary and inevitable reconstruction of remembering, and we are meant to see through it into the import of the events themselves, while it is the reconstruction per se that is the focus of Absalom, the bricolage of people "out of rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking". In the story framed by the above quotation, Quentin and Shreve are engaged in an act of almost pure fiction-making, since there is no evidence elsewhere that the lawyer they posit ever existed. Thus the convolutions, the expansiveness, of Absalom's style do not need to trouble the surface of Mrs. Hines's text, since it is not the **act of remembering itself** that hurts her, but the **content of the memory**.

But the syntax of the frames themselves tells the real story, demonstrating that what Light can, for its purposes, afford to take for granted, Absalom must, for its purposes,

subject to the most desperate scrutiny. If we delete the parenthetical in the first sentence of the Absalom frame, we are left with this: "they stared--glared--at one another, their voices...quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporising breath". We are left with a sentence that resembles sentences in the Light frame--poetic, to be sure, but we have lost the commentary on the difference or lack of difference between the tellers and the nature of the telling itself; we have excised a mass of qualification, restriction, modality, and subordination, lost the reflexivity that the expanding middle accomplishes. The Light frame does contain a reflection on the telling, but it is simplicity itself compared to the morass of grammatical complexities required to speak about the same activity (speaking) contained in the parenthetical from Absalom⁵. Light is satisfied with a gesture at tone of voice, accomplished through two appositives, the first one modifying "tone", and the second modifying the subject of the first appositive, "two voices"; Absalom also employs a structure in apposition to "voices", a parenthetical. But within this parenthetical the syntax unfolds another universe in which there are multiple levels of further apposition and subordination and restriction of identity.

To account for the lack of expansiveness in Light, I have suggested that Absalom is concerned explicitly with the problem of fiction-making, while Light lacks this kind of reflexivity. Quentin and Shreve never knew Sutpen and Henry and Judith and Bon, while Mrs. Hines was present at Joe Christmas's birth and Doc Hines presided over his early childhood. The Hines's need not imagine, only remember. But we can control for this difference in the comparison between these two novels: Rosa Coldfield, too, need only remember--the syntax of her speech, therefore, does not need to be complicated. Of course, it is complicated, which suggests that there are other, additional factors troubling the syntactical surface of Absalom.

In order to see these "additional factors", we must first analyze the way in which a passage from Light achieves cohesiveness. The focal point of this analysis will be the story of Joe Christmas's birth (Light, 350-365). The process of telling his story accomplishes a smoothing-out of (that is, making cohesive and coherent) an emotionally troubled act of remembering. Early in the storytelling Byron acts as interpreter, imposing order on the apparently random expostulations of Doc and Mrs. Hines. Having heard the story once already, he is able to fill the cohesive gaps left by the witnesses' recounting of the events. The storytelling is prompted by Byron's request: "Tell him [Hightower] why you came. What you came to Jefferson for" (350). This question is answered nineteen pages later, when Mrs. Hines asks Hightower to provide Joe with an alibi for his whereabouts on the night of Joanna Burden's murder: "You could say he was here with you that night" (369). With this, a circle is complete: but getting to it involves the story of Joe's birth, as Mrs. Hines complies with Byron's request on page 350 this way:

... "I aint never seen him when he could walk," she says.
 "Not for thirty years I never saw him. Never once walking on his own feet and calling his own name--" (350)

The descent into the past constellated here is complicated by the outburst from Doc Hines which follows it:

"Bitchery and abomination!" the man says suddenly. His voice is high, shrill, strong. "Bitchery and abomination!" Then he ceases. Out of his immediate and dreamlike state he shouts the three words with outrageous and prophetlike suddenness, and that is all. Hightower looks at him, and then at Byron. Byron says quietly:

"He is their daughter's child. He--" with a slight movement of the head he indicates the old man, who is now watching Hightower with his bright, mad glare--"he took it right after it was born and carried it away. She didn't know what he did with it. She never even knew if it was still alive or not until--"

The old man interrupts again, with that startling suddenness. But he does not shout this time: his voice now is as calm and logical as Byron's own. He talks clearly, just a little jerkily: "Yes. Old Doc Hines took him..." (350)

"Bitchery and abomination" requires some explanation. What does it have to do with the conversation between Byron and Mrs. Hines that has preceded it? Byron tries to fill this cohesive gap by furnishing some information about Joe's mother, knowing as he does that for Hines she represents the original act of "bitchery and abomination": "He [Joe] is their daughter's child". The rest of Byron's comments explain how it is that Mrs. Hines could be deprived of contact with her grandson for so many years. This explanation prompts another interruption from Hines:

Yes. Old Doc Hines took him. God give Old Doc Hines his chance and so old Doc Hines give God his chance too. So out of the mouths of little children God used his will. The little children hollering Nigger! Nigger! at him in the hearing of God and man both, showing God's will. And old Doc Hines said to God, "But that aint enough. Them children call one another worse than nigger," and God said, "You wait and you watch, because I aint got the time to waste neither with this world's sluttishness and bitchery. I have put the mark on him and now I am going to put the knowledge. And I have set you there to watch and guard My will. It will be yours to tend to it and oversee." (351)

None of this is located in space or time: where is Joe taken? Who are the "little children hollering Nigger! Nigger! at him"? The use of the definite article in the phrase "the little children..." presupposes the readers' knowledge of an earlier item that is missing. Readers do not have the material to identify all of the elements in the passage effectively. Left to their own devices, Doc and Mrs. Hines speak achronologically, out of their distress and, in Mr. Hines's case, his psychosis: Byron imposes the chronology and keeps the events in order. Faulkner uses Byron as a sensitive cohesiveness seismograph, estimating and measuring the listener/reader's ability to identify the people and events mentioned by the speakers, and interposing Byron when he senses confusion.

Byron also controls the flow of the information the reader needs to make the text cohesive and coherent. We learn later that what Hines describes here does have something to do with where he took Joe, but Faulkner (through Byron) is not ready to give that

to us yet. Instead, Byron's response to Hightower's baffled "What's this? What's this?" (351) is to elaborate on Doc Hines himself, not to provide the details about the time and place that Hines was referring to:

I wanted [says Byron,] to fix it so she could come and talk to you without him being along...But there wasn't anywhere to leave him. He was trying down in Mottstown the other day to get folks worked up to lynch him [Joe]... (351)

This is the enigma hidden in Hines's initial outburst above, the enigma that Hightower articulates in his question, "Lynch his own grandson?" (351). Mrs. Hines tries to account for this hatred by going back fifty years: "For fifty years he's been like that" (352). In this way, Faulkner gets back to the real roots of the events around Joe's birth, which are in Hines's psychosis.

But this is not so simple. At the end of Mrs. Hines's speech, Hightower needs Byron again: "Again Hightower looks from her to Byron with that expression of glaring amazement" (353). I think Hightower follows Mrs. Hines until this sentence:

So when Lem Bush's wagon passed that night coming home from the circus and never stopped to let Milly out and Eupheus come back into the house and flung the things out of the drawer until he come to the postol [sic] I said "Eupheus, it's the devil. It's not Milly's safety that's quicking you now"... (352)

For Mrs. Hines, this sentence illustrates her point about her husband: it proves that "heaven never thought him fiten to raise a daughter" (352). That it is intended as a demonstration, as proof positive, of statements made in the previous discourse about her husband's character and motivations is signalled by the use of the causal conjunction "So", which instructs us to read the sentence following it as causally linked to the preceding discourse: Hines had been "doing well because he hadn't begun then to take god's name in vain and in pride to justify and excuse the devil that was in him" (352). When Milly fails to appear, Mr. Hines ceases to "do well" and relapses into the old psychosis, prompting Mrs. Hines to say "So...I said 'Eupheus, it's the devil'".

But notice the deletion: in deleting the adverbial clause ("when Lem Bush's wagon passed that night coming home from the circus and never stopped to let Milly out and Eupheus come back into the house and flung the things out of the drawer until he come to the postol"), I have eliminated the bulk of the sentence and stressed the cohesive tie between this sentence and the preceding ones; but the adverbial clause is, I think, the source of Hightower's confusion. Mrs. Hines constructs the sentence so that the information contained in the adverbial clause is presupposed as known, and is therefore unemphasized, relegated to a prefatory position in the sentence--it is the background against which her husband's demon re-emerges. For Hightower, however, this information is brand new: which night? who is Lem Bush? What circus? Why should Milly be in the wagon? Why should her absence prompt Hines to throw articles out of a drawer in search of a gun? Faulkner uses the adverbial clause to introduce new information necessary to the plot, and in the same stroke links the re-emergence of Hines's psychosis to the night of Joe's conception. This does create confusion, but Byron comes to the rescue, backtracking to fill in the gaps, providing a service to the reader that Faulkner declines to offer in Absalom.

Hines can't keep still: as Byron is clarifying Mrs. Hines, Doc Hines chimes in again. He comes at the linear narrative, the proper sequence of cause and effect that Byron is trying to establish, "out of his immediate and dreamlike state" (350)--that is, he comes tangentially, out of his psychotic obsessions:

He knowed. Old doc Hines knowed. He had seen the womansign of God's abomination already on her, under her clothes. So when he went and put on his raincoat and lit the lantern and come back, she was already at the door, with a raincoat on too... (353)

Causal "so" is employed here too, before a clause containing plot information: Milly's eagerness here, the speed with which she gets ready to go, points ahead to her sneaking out. And this sneaking out is linked for Hines with "God's abomination of womanflesh". This, and the leap that Hines makes towards the end

of his speech ("telling old Doc Hines, that knowed better, that he was a Mexican. When old Doc Hines could see in his face the black curse of God Almighty" [353-4]) forces Hightower to look to Byron for clarification one more time.

Now that the events around Joe's conception have been told, Mrs. Hines and Doc begin to tell parallel stories: Mrs. Hines narrates Joe's birth, Milly's death, Doc's theft of Joe, and the story of the intervening years; Doc tells about what he thought he was doing, and in the process comes into contact with information about Joe's childhood that we already have from Chapter 6. Suddenly, Byron is no longer needed to organize the narrative; his straightening and organizing and filling-in ceases. Suddenly the Hines's are capable of doing it themselves. After the presupposed items are activated once again--that is, brought back from earlier appearances in the narrative--we have the material we need to interpret the references and order returns. The events of that night still carry, even in memory, all the original feelings of anguish and despair. Not surprisingly, the objective linear cause-and-effect provided by Byron is not the first concern of the speakers, who are speaking out of grief. As the narrative moves away from that crisis, and as the necessary background information has been established and our ears have become accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of the speakers, order returns. In Absalom, order never returns in this sense. Shreve is in a position similar to Hightower's, and from time to time requests clarification from Quentin, who relates the stories of others much as Byron does. But Shreve is not introduced until chapter 6, leaving us without a Hightower, without even a Byron, for a considerable stretch of text. And the narrative refuses linearity and cohesion even after his introduction, as he involves himself in the creative, unendable activity of making meaning of those events.

III

Before turning to the problem of cohesiveness in Absalom, I

want to look at what constitutes "order" in the narratives of Byron, Mrs. Hines, and Doc. This will serve as a baseline against which I can measure the stylistic innovations contained not only in Miss Rosa's narratives but in the narratives of all of Absalom's speakers. I will contrast this "order", this unmarked and cohesive style of narration, with the "expansive", marked style that dominates Absalom's narratives and creates problems for cohesion.

Relative to the speakers in Absalom, none of the three storytellers I am concerned with here makes extensive use of the resources of the relative clause or appositive. Let's look first at a randomly selected passage from Byron's narrative:

But he rode right up behind the buggy, the first buggy he had seen that night. He rode up on the right side of it and he leaned down, still in the pitch dark and without saying a word and without stopping his horse, and grabbed the man that might have been a stranger or a neighbour for all he could have known by sight or by hearing. Grabbed him by one hand and held the pistol against him with the other and shot him dead and brought the gal back home behind him on the horse. He left the buggy and the man both there in the road. It was raining again, too. (355)

Each sentence here furthers the action of the scene-- the first sentence tells us that "he rode right up behind the buggy", and the second sentence says "he rode up on the right side of it." He's behind it, then he's on its right side, and then "he leaned down...and grabbed the man". Then the grabbing is described, then the shooting, then the return. The closest thing here to an "expansive" effect is in the compounding of adverbials in the second sentence ("still in the pitch dark and without saying a word and without stopping his horse") and in the compounding of the third sentence. The compounding seems to demonstrate the ruthless rapidity and efficiency of Hines's brutality, his relentless pursuit and pitiless achievement. The relative clause in the second sentence ("that might have been a stranger or a neighbour for all he could have known by sight or by hearing") is not opened up as relatives so often are in Absalom. As a result of this lack of opening, there are no items in the passage that

cannot be interpreted by referring to the surrounding text; nothing in this passage refers to anything besides this specific episode.

In this randomly selected passage from Mrs. Hines's narrative, we see the compounding noted above, as well as a feature I remarked on in Part 2:

But Eupheus wouldn't move, and Milly's time coming and Eupheus with that pistol, trying to find a doctor that would do it. And then I heard how he was in jail again; how he had been going to church and to prayer meeting and went to the pulpit and began to preach himself, yelling against niggers, for the white folks to turn out and kill them all, and the folks in the church made him quit and come down from the pulpit and he threatened them with the pistol, there in the church, until the law came and arrested him and him like a crazy man for a while. (357)

There are only two sentences here. The first is characterized by the compounding of fragments--the auxiliary verb carrying tense is dropped ("Milly's time [was] coming"), leaving the main verb. The second sentence has four conjunctive links, expanding the sentence through compounds. This compounded string comes in the second of two adverbial clauses expanding what Mrs. Hines heard: the first ("how he was in jail again") tells us the fact, simply what she heard, while the second explains how the fact came to be. The second folds time back, then puts it straight: he had been going to church, he started preaching, they pulled him from the pulpit, he threatened them, they threw him in jail. So while what Mrs. Hines heard is expanded, the expansion, again, is minor, a practical fold in time to explain the origins of something in the previous discourse. The focus stays on the activities that landed Doc Hines in jail, and everything we need to interpret that situation is given to us. In Absalom, these sites are fraught with difficulty: the storytellers spend a great deal of time exploring these descents, these folds.

Finally there is Doc Hines:

So old Doc Hines he watched and he waited. From God's own boiler room he watched them children, and the devil's walking seed unbeknownst among them, polluting the earth with the working of that word on him. Because he didn't

play with the other children no more now. He stayed by himself, standing still, and then old Doc Hines knew that he was listening to the hidden warning of God's doom, and old Doc Hines said to him, "Why don't you play with them other children like you used to?" and he didn't say nothing and old Doc Hines said, "Is it because they call you nigger?" and he didn't say nothing and old Doc Hines said, "Do you think you are a nigger because god has marked your face?" and he said "Is God a nigger too?" and old Doc Hines said "He is the Lord God of wrathful hosts, His will be done. Not yours and not mine, because you and me are both a part of His purpose and His vengeance."

His is the most idiomatic speech, shot through with the subjunctives of Old Testament rhetoric--"He is the Lord God of wrathful hosts, His will be done". The fourth sentence (beginning "He stayed by himself...") expands through compounding, encoding the turn and turn-about of conversation until Hines can unleash his fire-and-brimstone in response to Joe's question, "Is God a nigger too?". But the expansion here is linear, uni-directional: it allows Hines's speech to build to a fine roll, without the distractions of digression, qualification, and modification that are accomplished through relative clauses and appositives and in Absalom put cohesion at risk. The compound sentences put one idea in front of another, relentlessly. Despite his manic obsessions, Doc's story does advance.

As the Hines' story moves away from the trauma of that night thirty years previous, their narrative "straightens", becomes cohesive and therefore coherent. As the following discussion of Rosa Coldfield's narrative will show, this process is much more complex in Absalom: the cohesiveness monitor that is Byron is missing from her narrative, and there is no one to "get it straight" for the reader. It is replaced and complicated by the expansiveness, creating a very different type of narrative. The closest thing to Byron is Shreve, and he does not appear until Chapter 6. In terms of the stylistics of storytelling, the move from Byron and Doc and Mrs. Hines to Rosa Coldfield can be

characterized as a move from linearity to circularity. Where Light's storytellers are able to remember the events surrounding Joe's birth and childhood with limited recourse to the resources of the appositive and relative clause--that is, with a limited amount of exploration--Rosa Coldfield's memory of Sutpen uses these stylistic features compulsively. Where Byron helps the Hines's to go back to the beginning and tell the story forward to their present moment, Miss Rosa speaks out of "the lonely thwarted old female flesh embattled for forty-three years in the old insult, the old unforgiving outraged and betrayed by the final and complete affront which was Sutpen's death"(9). She is railing against death itself, refusing to allow the dead to be dead, which entails the incessant going-over of events in a doomed attempt to understand or settle them in some way once and for all. The presence of Byron in Light represents a different vision of the past and its effect on the present: Byron is able to close the cohesive gaps, to make the meaningful connections between events that resolve paradox and clarify enigma. In Light, the South knows what has happened to itself. The lack of a Byron--of cohesive relationships which can provide interpretations and explanations--in Absalom results in the narrators' frustration, in outraged amazed recapitulation. History is "history-for", as Colleen Donnelly has said, and that is not enough. The South knows what has happened to itself, but cannot understand it. Rosa's trauma, her "old unforgiving outraged and betrayed", linked as it is with the Civil War, that most profound of American national traumas, expresses itself through a syntactically traumatized narrative, one which constantly escapes order, defies cohesiveness, and rejects all closure outside of death.

The story⁶ that begins on page 9 and continues almost uninterrupted to page 22 is ordered, on the macro-level, by five recurring statements that vary only slightly with each repetition⁷. These structures are reasserted across the chapter, while more local, micro-level phenomena dominate smaller

stretches of text. It is these micro-level phenomena--relative clauses and appositives--that waylay the thematized elements on the macro-level--the five statements--and constitute the "pathology" of Rosa's syntax. The five statements need to be repeated because their force as thematized material drains from them through the constellations of relatives and appositives between the paragraphs. In Part 2 I characterized this phenomenon as being the result of "digressive syntax", and also suggested that the relatives introduce material that is new to the reader but assumed as given by the speaker. Both of these facts create ruptures in cohesion. Information that is brought into the narrative through the relative clauses and appositives --on the micro-level of the text--often works its way to the macro-level and thematic status. But because that information is assumed as known, the co-text necessary for its interpretation accretes around it gradually, almost incidentally. It is in this rather disorienting way that the story of the Sutpens is told.

Miss Rosa's storytelling begins this way:

He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman. He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name **which nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own anymore than the horse was his own or even the pistols**, seeking someplace to hide himself, and Yoknapatawpha County supplied him with it. He sought the guarantee of reputable men to barricade him from the other and later strangers **who might come seeking him in turn**, and Jefferson gave him that. Then he needed respectability, **the shield of a virtuous woman**, to make his position impregnable even against the men **who had given him protection** on that inevitable day and hour when even they must rise against him in scorn and horror and outrage; and it was mine and Ellen's father who gave him that. (9, relative clauses and appositives in bold)

The opening of Miss Rosa's story progresses with a linear order and remains cohesive: the passage tells of the process by which Sutpen acquired the gentlemanly attributes he lacked upon his arrival in Jefferson: he sought "some place to hide himself", then "the guarantee of reputable men", and finally "respectability, the shield of a virtuous woman". The relative clauses and the appositive are unobtrusive, and make no attempt

to pull the narrative away from its thematic focus, created lexically through words like "gentleman", "respectability", and "virtuous". We are in familiar territory here, recognizing the uncomplicated use of relatives from the storytelling of Byron and the Hines'. But this thematic and cohesive simplicity is about to become complicated: the statement that Sutpen was not a gentleman is repeated again on page 11, as the opening of the paragraph; the statement of the Coldfield's relationship to Sutpen is introduced here and taken up again on page 13, where it opens a paragraph and thereby takes on thematic force. This recapitulation is necessary because of the following expansion of relative clauses, which occurs immediately after the passage above:

Oh, I hold no brief for Ellen: **blind romantic fool who had only youth and inexperience to excuse her even if that;** blind romantic fool, then later blind woman mother fool when she no longer had youth or inexperience to excuse her, when she lay dying in the house **for which she had exchanged pride and peace both** and nobody there but the daughter who was **already the same as a widow without ever having been a bride and was, three years later, to be a widow sure enough without ever having been anything at all,** and the son who had repudiated the very roof under which he had been born and to which he would return but once more before **disappearing for good, and that as a murderer and almost a fratricide...** (10, relative clauses in bold)

This passage begins with a statement the sense of which is tangential to the preceding discourse: why should Rosa refuse to make excuses for Ellen? The reader knows only that Ellen is Rosa's sister, and that she was married to Sutpen--we know nothing yet about her role in her own marriage. Instead of telling us this story from the beginning, what follows is dependent upon the adverbial clause "when she no longer had youth or inexperience to excuse her...", which contains within it the restrictive relatives relating to "the daughter" ("who was already the same as a widow...") and "the son" ("who had repudiated the very roof under which he had been born..."), pushing the focus of the passage far away from Ellen, and even further again from Sutpen. The stories of Judith and Henry are of

course related to the story of Sutpen and Ellen, but the point to emphasize here is that the reader knows very little about that at this point: "the son" and "the daughter" appear in Rosa's discourse as known quantities, as if the details of their beginnings and endings are known to the speaker and the listener. But they are not known to the reader; there is no stand-in for the reader, no Hightower to interject with "what's this? what's this?" when unfamiliar material is introduced as known, and no Byron to answer him if there were. We move from Sutpen, to Ellen, to Judith (unnamed, merely "the daughter") to Henry (also unnamed, "the son") with no outside authority to explain the references.

The next sentence moves us back to Sutpen, with whom the paragraph began:

...and he, fiend blackguard and devil, in Virginia fighting, where the chances of earth's being rid of him were the best anywhere under the sun, yet Ellen and I both knowing that he would return, that every man in our armies would have to fall before bullet or ball found him...(10)

But this mention of Sutpen, rather than forming part of Rosa's statements about his general character with which she began, locates him at a specific moment, the time when Ellen "lay dying in that house...and nobody there but the daughter...and the son...": at this time, Sutpen was "in Virginia fighting". The next sentence supports this interpretation:

...and only I, a child, a child mind you, four years younger than the very niece I was asked to save, for Ellen to turn to and say, "Protect her. Protect Judith at least."(10)

Here Rosa seems to be referring to a specific moment in time, and is no longer making general statements about his character. The conjunction at the beginning of this quotation, preceded by a semi-colon, creates a kind of simultaneity: we are meant to see this request as occurring simultaneously with Sutpen's absence. Where was Rosa at this time?--close enough for Ellen to ask her to "protect Judith." At this point, as a reader I must revise my understanding of the entire discourse from "Oh, I hold no brief for Ellen". We begin the passage with general statements about

Ellen and Sutpen, but Rosa's discourse quickly moves into more specific aspects of her relationship to Ellen. The point that Rosa seems to be making is that Ellen was so abandoned, so profoundly betrayed by Sutpen, "who was not even a gentleman", that she was forced to enlist Rosa to protect her daughter. That she finds herself in this situation at all is, according to Rosa, the natural consequence of her "blind romantic" foolishness. This quotation is the grammatical conclusion of the preceding discourse, the first full-fledged sentence break since "...it was mine and Ellen's father who gave him that" at the end of page 9. It is the last in a series of compound sentences that sit above the complex webs of dependent clauses, and from which those webs depend: "...and nobody there but the daughter ...and the son...;and he...in Virginia fighting...yet Ellen and I both knowing...;and only I...to turn to and say 'Protect her. Protect Judith at least.'" The request to protect Judith will become a strongly thematized element later in Rosa's storytelling.

As if to confirm the ending of this chain, the next sentence returns us to the beginning of the chain:

Yes, blind romantic fool, who did not even have that hundred miles of plantation which apparently moved our father nor that big house and the notion of slaves underfoot day and night which reconciled, I won't say moved, her aunt.(10)

Not only did Ellen lack family support, she lacked even material support--no land and no slaves. Again, the preferred method of discussing Ellen (or anybody) is to meditate and ruminate upon her in the relative clause, in this case the non-restrictive relative. In terms of thematic focus, the issue of Sutpen's status as a gentleman has been all but forgotten. Rosa is hung up on the figure of Ellen, on exploring the noun phrase "blind romantic fool", from which so much depends. Look at the forest the reader has been forced to wander through to get to this point. The main clause structure is relatively simple, but we are not permitted to skirt the fringes of it; we must penetrate into the thick of the modifying clauses in order to explore the meaning of the main clause. Faulkner, as I pointed out in Part 1,

makes use of this structure elsewhere to encode the activity of memory, but it is the extremity of its use here that is remarkable, an extremity concomitant with his narrators' extreme difficulty with the act of making meaning.

But this is the end of the meditation upon Ellen, and the return to an exploration of Sutpen. This is signalled by the beginning of the next sentence: "No: just the face of a man who contrived somehow to swagger even on a horse"(10). The previous discourse has been characterized by a discussion of what Ellen had and did not have--she had only Rosa, and doomed children; she did not have land, slaves, or loving husband. She has "just the face of a man...". In the journey through the relative clauses and appositives that follow, Ellen will vanish completely:

No: just the face of a man who contrived somehow to swagger even on a horse--a man who so far as anyone (including the father who was to give him a daughter in marriage) knew either had no past at all or did not dare to reveal it--a man who rode into town out of nowhere with a horse and two pistols and a herd of wild beasts that he had hunted down singlehanded because he was stronger in fear than even they were in whatever heathen place he had fled from, and that french architect who looked like he had been hunted down and caught in turn by the negroes--a man who fled here and hid, concealed himself behind respectability, behind that hundred mile of land which he took from a tribe of ignorant indians, nobody knows how, and a house the size of a courthouse where he lived for three years without a window or door or bedstead in it and still called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a king's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather--a home, position: a wife and family which being necessary to concealment, he kept along with the rest of respectability as he would have accepted the necessary discomfort and even pain of the briars and thorns in a thicket if the thicket could have given him the protection he sought. (10-11, relatives and appositives in bold)

The thematic focus shifts again: we began with Sutpen ("He wasn't even a gentleman") and we finish with him, studying him with an intense scrutiny that is accomplished through the relative clauses. The end of this passage brings us to the end of the paragraph. The next paragraph begins with a repetition of the words with which Rosa began: "No; not even a gentleman"(11). We are back to the macro-level of cohesiveness, through a devious

and complex route. The issue of Sutpen's respectability is raised again, which ties it back to the opening of Rosa's telling.

This passage also demonstrates that the relative clauses are a place, as they were for Rosa's description of Ellen, for recapitulation. Compare⁸ the information about Sutpen provided at the beginning of the paragraph with the details accumulated by or added at the end of the paragraph: the repeated material has to do with Sutpen's lack of respectability, his failure to be a gentleman, and his ruthlessness in acquiring the trappings of respectability and position. But collected alongside of this thematized material, drawn in with it, as it were, is seemingly unrelated material. Passage C in endnote 8 is merely Passage B with the repeated material detailed, leaving the new information behind. The most striking introduction of new information as given, known information has to do with the "herd of wild beasts", "the french architect", and "that hundred mile of land". Through the restrictive relative it is presupposed, introduced as known, but is new information for the reader. These events will be narrated in full, but they also will be repeated just like this, in the same slot--the restrictive relative slot-- and so come to be used as shorthand images for Sutpen's "design", symbols of his monstrous creativity, which the speakers contemplate with fascination and horror and attempt to come to terms with--hence their repetition (and their presupposition, if we see presupposition as resulting from the narrators' very personal obsessions).

These subtle modulations of detail and the accretionary addition of new information are typical of the style of storytelling in Absalom. While in both Absalom and Light Faulkner is telling stories through the syntax of grief and despair, the focus of Light is the contemporary manifestation of old wounds while the focus of Absalom is the first wounding, the originary moment. Doc Hines is the source and fount of evil in

Light, and Joe is in a sense his victim: Joe's membership in the human race is revoked on the basis of a madman's suspicions, suspicions that themselves come from, are made possible by, the cultural matrix of the South and Calvinism, so that the madman's madness comes to represent a kind of madness in Southern culture as a whole. Joe is born as the scapegoat for sins perpetrated in the name of this madness.

But Absalom goes right to the historical source of the madness itself--the Civil War--in which lie the very origins of Joe's despair and Doc Hines's psychosis, and in so doing enters the realm of the mythic. Sutpen is a tragic figure in the same way that Macbeth and Agamemnon are tragic figures: they each transgress the bonds and obligations of human relationship for the sake of fantastic individual ambition. The trauma that initiates Sutpen's transgression is itself a transgression of the bonds and obligations of human relationship, a uniquely Southern one. He has a vision of himself as he looks through the eyes of the plantation owner and his black slave, and in the moment that defines the rest of his life sees

...the boy outside the barred door in his patched garments and splayed bare feet, looking through and beyond the boy, he himself seeing his own father and sisters and brothers as the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) [who had told him to go around to the back of the house and so brought about this brutal epiphany] must have been seeing them all the time--as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them, who would in turn spawn with brutish and vicious prolixity, populate, double treble and compound, fill space and earth with a race whose future would be a succession of cut-down and patched and made-over garments bought on exorbitant credit because they were white people, from stores where niggers were given the garments free, with for sole heritage that expression on a balloon face bursting with laughter which had looked out at some unremembered and nameless progenitor who had knocked at a door when he was a little boy and had been told by a nigger to go around to the back... (189-190)

Sutpen, like Christmas, is an Untouchable in his culture's caste system. His mountain-bred republican innocence is shattered by

this confrontation with the old corrupt caste system. This is true tragic irony, and is perhaps a truly American tragedy, pointing up the paradox inherent in its republican, democratic vision. Thus the syntax which tells, which voices, the history of this tragic trauma as it is epitomized in Sutpen is the syntax of minds trying to understand and resolve the paradox.

Endnotes

1. Cohesion, as defined by Halliday and Hasan, "is the means whereby elements that are structurally unrelated to one another are linked together through the dependence of one on the other for its interpretation" (Cohesion in English, 27). Elements that are "structurally unrelated" are elements which are not subject to the limitations imposed by the "clause complex" (roughly corresponding to the sentence)--that is, structurally unrelated elements refer to semantic relationships within texts that "cannot be achieved by grammatical structure" (Functional Grammar, 288) or other forms of textual structure (ie the "given/new" categories of information structure). Cohesion refers to the ways in which grammatical and other structures relate to each other:

in order to construct discourse we need to be able to establish additional relations within the text...that may involve elements of any extent, both smaller and larger than clauses, from single words to lengthy passages of text; and that may be held across gaps of any extent, both within the clause and beyond it, without regard to the nature of whatever intervenes. (Functional Grammar, 288)

Cohesion refers to the rather mysterious process by which a text becomes more than a random assortment of unrelated words and sentences.

A cohesive relationship occurs "where the INTERPRETATION of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one PRESUPPOSES the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it" (Cohesion in English, 4; emphasis in original). It is precisely in the task of "effective decoding" that readers of Absalom encounter difficulty. The second term that would allow us to decode a first is often withheld, so that coherence, which is the result of cohesiveness, is delayed, and is not something that is available to the reader at any point in the text.

2. Cf. Part 2, "Digressive Syntax and the Dynamics of Narrative Progress".

3. But this does not mean that memory and knowledge are not complicated concepts here:

Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long garbled cold echoing building of dark red brick sootbleakened by more chimney's than its own, set in a grassless cinderstrewnpacked compound surrounded by smoking factory purlieus and enclosed by a ten foot steel-and-wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo, where in random erratic

surges, with sparrowlike childtrebling, orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacent chimney's streaked like black tears. (111)

It seems to me that Faulkner has inverted the idea of "memory" and "knowing": shouldn't memory remember, and belief be linked with knowledge? Perhaps we are meant to see belief and knowledge as two different things, to understand that to have a belief is not the same as having knowledge. And if that is the case, then our memories have a good deal more belief in them than knowledge, and that the belief takes precedence over the deeper, less conscious knowledge that lies in what we remember. Perhaps we need to go through belief, which shifts according to what we feel we can tolerate or cope with, to get to a core of knowledge that is less susceptible to the vagaries of consciousness yet underlies and informs it: "...in and out of remembering but in knowing constant..." as Faulkner puts it, constructing knowledge as immune from remembering and forgetting. This is something that Faulkner cannot allow Absalom's storytellers to take for granted--they cannot pierce the veil between belief and knowledge since most of them do not have memory, only stories handed to them by people who do have the memories but have knowledge and belief all mixed up together, so that the inheritors of the story--Quentin and Shreve--must engage an impossible task of disentangling the Knower from the Known, Rosa from the events she experienced and witnessed. The incessant recapitulation, scrutiny and analysis of character and event that occurs in the relatives, appositives, and parentheticals of Absalom try to align event and character so that meaning--truth--will emerge. But finally there are only stories. It is significant that Faulkner should, in his most tightly focused investigation of the tragedy of Southern history, utilize a style that renders any and all conclusions about the motives of the family which embodies that tragedy a matter of speculation and conjecture.

4. The framing structure described below is, in fact, one-half of a larger frame. In both novels the storytelling begins in a similar manner:

(Absalom 176, opening of Ch.7) There was no snow on Shreve's arms now, no sleeve on his arm at all now: only the smooth cupid-fleshed forearm and the hand coming back into the lamp and taking a pipe from the empty coffee can where he kept them, filling it and lighting it. So it is zero outside, Quentin thought; soon he will raise the window and do deep breathing in it, clench-fisted and naked to the waist, in the warm and rosy orifice above the iron quad. But he had not done so yet, and now the moment, the thought, was an hour past and the pipe lay smoked out and overturned and cold, with a light sprinkling of ashes about it, on the

table before Shreve's crossed pink bright-haired arms while he watched Quentin from behind the two opaque and lamp-glared moons of his spectacles. "So he just wanted a grandson," he said...

(Light 71, opening Ch. 4) They sit facing one another across the desk. The study is lighted now, by a greenshaded reading lamp sitting upon the desk. Hightower sits behind it, in an ancient swivel chair, Byron in a straight chair opposite. Both their faces are just without the direct downward pool of light from the shaded lamp. Through the open window the sound of singing from the distant church comes. Byron talks in a flat, level voice.

"It was a strange thing..."

Face to face, two men sit together to tell and to hear a tale. Returns to this desk, that room at Harvard, punctuate the story, though only Lena's story is told at this time in Hightower's office, while half of Absalom is told to Shreve in that cold room at Harvard.

5. This is a matter of proportion. Light is capable of expansiveness too:

...they told him. And how Hightower had come straight to Jefferson from the seminary, refusing to accept any other call; how he had pulled every string he could in order to be sent to Jefferson. And how he arrived with his young wife, descending from the train in a state of excitement already, talking, telling the old men and women who were the pillars of the church how he had set his mind on Jefferson from the first, since he had first decided to become a minister; telling them with a kind of glee of the letters he had written and the worrying he had done and the influence he had used in order to be called here. (55)

The passage begins with the townspeople telling Byron how Hightower had arrived, then with the townspeople telling Byron about how Hightower told the congregation about how he had arrived. In its layering of reported speech and its expansion through the appositives, it is a full-fledged Absalom pattern (only Absalom in a situation like this drops the periods altogether and uses semi-colons, colons, dashes, etc.). In the passage below, the independent clause "they must have looked a little like they were praying" is expanded through two appositives:

Facing each other across the dark, stained, greasecrusted and frictionsmooth counter, they must have looked a little like they were praying: the youth countryfaced, in clean and spartan clothing, with an awkwardness which invested him with a quality unworldly and innocent; and the woman

opposite him, downcast, still, waiting, who because of her smallness partook likewise of that quality of his, of something beyond flesh. (168)

Again, these instances are exceptional.

6. I have already discussed some of this material in Part 2 (endnote 8), but my concern there was with the problem of repetition and the lack of differentiation among narrative voices.

7. By structures on the "macro-level", I mean statements that are repeated across the passage in question. The request to "protect Judith", for example, is repeated across nine pages, and is one of the points to which Rosa's narrative continually returns.

The following statements are numbered 1 through 5 according to the order of their first appearance in the narrative. The original statement comes first, and the repetition of that statement follows the colon. Each statement is followed by the page number on which it appears.

1. "He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman"(9) : "No: not even a gentleman"(11)

2. "...it was mine and Ellen's father who gave him that [respectability]"(9) : "But that it should have been our father, mine and Ellen's father..."(13)

3. "Oh, I hold no brief for Ellen: blind romantic fool who..."(9) : "No. I hold no more brief for Ellen than I do for myself."(12) : "No. I hold no brief for myself."(12)

4. "Protect her. Protect Judith at least."(10) : "Protect her, at least."(15) : "Yes. From them. From themselves."(17) : "Yes. From themselves." (19)

5. "Because I was born too late."(15) : "Yes. I was born too late."(15)

Micro Structures

The following are clusters of repeated phrases or expressions. They differ from the macro-structure in their brevity, occurring in clusters that are limited to a page. The repeated phrase is listed first, then the number of times it is repeated, then the page number on which it occurs.

1. "a man who"--x4 (10)

2. "I saw"--x7 (12)

3. "I don't plead"--x4 (12-13)

This may seem like a short list, but each of these phrases controls long stretches of text.

8. Passage A is the opening of Rosa's story. The recapitulated material is numbered 1 through 5. These numbers designate the recapitulated material in passage B, and designate the omitted recapitulated material in Passage C. Thus Passage A's number 1 is the same as Passage B's and Passage C's number 1--"With a horse and two pistols"(A), "with a horse and two pistols"(B), and the deleted phrase ("with a horse and two pistols") in Passage C.

A: He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman. He came here **with a horse and two pistols¹** and **a name which nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own, anymore than the horse was his own or even the pistols², seeking someplace to hide himself³**, and Yoknapatawpha County supplied him with it. He **sought the guarantee of reputable men to barricade him⁴** from the other and later strangers who might come seeking him in turn, and Jefferson gave him that. Then he needed **respectability, the shield of a virtuous woman, to make his position impregnable⁵** even against the men who had given him protection on that inevitable day and hour when even they must rise against him in scorn and horror and outrage; and it was mine and Ellen's father who gave him that.(9)

B: No: just the face of a man who contrived somehow to swagger even on a horse--a man who so far as anyone (including the father who was to give him a daughter in marriage) knew either **had no past at all or did not dare to reveal it²--a man who rode into town out of nowhere with a horse and two pistols¹** and a herd of wild beasts that he had hunted down singlehanded because he was stronger in fear than even they were in whatever heathen place he had fled from, and that french architect who looked like he had been hunted down and caught in turn by the negroes--a man who **fled here and hid, concealed himself³ behind respectability⁴**, behind that hundred mile of land which he took from a tribe of ignorant indians, nobody knows how, and a house the size of a courthouse where he lived for three years without a window or door or bedstead in it and still called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a king's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather--**a home, position: a wife and family which being necessary to concealment, he kept along with the rest of respectability⁵** as he would have accepted the necessary discomfort and even pain of the briars and thorns in a thicket if the thicket could have given him the protection he sought.(10-11)

Passage C is the same as Passage B, but the recapitulated material has been deleted.

C: No: just the face of a man who contrived somehow to swagger even on a horse--a man who so far as anyone (including the father who was to give him a daughter in marriage) knew either...² --a man who rode into town out of nowhere...¹ and a herd of wild beasts that he had hunted down singlehanded because he was stronger in fear than even they were in whatever heathen place he had fled from, and that french architect who looked like he had been hunted down and caught in turn by the negroes--a man who...³...⁴ , behind that hundred mile of land which he took from a tribe of ignorant indians, nobody knows how, and a house the size of a courthouse where he lived for three years without a window or door or bedstead in it and still called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a king's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather-- ...⁵as he would have accepted the necessary discomfort and even pain of the briers and thorns in a thicket if the thicket could have given him the protection he sought. (10-11)

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