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The Absent Presence of the Parental Generation: Incest and the Ordering of Experience in The Sound and the Fury

by

John M. Hannah

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English.

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JOHN M. HANNAH. The Absent Presence of the Parental Generation: Incest and the Ordering of Experience in The Sound and the Fury (Under the direction of Fred Hobson).

ABSTRACT

In The Sound and the Fury, the older generation of Compsons and Bascombs stand failed and ghostlike as a shadow of the process that consumes their four offspring and ends the family line. Though marginalized by critics, the story of the parents and uncle lies embedded within the given world of the Compson children, maintained by an ever-present past, the doubling that exists between the two generations, and a repetitious pattern of incest and failure. Through the reader's active participation, however, the older generation's story emerges out of the larger whole created from the novel's disparate, subjective parts. In defining incest as the vehicle for the family decline, the reader finds textual evidence suggesting that Caroline Compson and Maury Bascomb have engaged in an incestuous relationship, in spirit if not in reality, that precipitates the failure of their generation, possibly resulting in the birth of either one or both of the two youngest Compson sons.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA Absalom, Absalom!

SF The Sound and the Fury

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, critics from all disciplines have created readings of the text that draw from every conceivable philosophical orientation, seeking to define the novel's unifying thematic and formal elements. While focusing upon and emphasizing the four Compson children--the novel's subjective, generational center--critics largely ignore the presence and importance of the older generation, the children's parents and uncle, marginalizing them as dysfunctional and two-dimensional, failed and spiritually impoverished individuals who exist as a backdrop or prop to underline the story of their offspring. Looking at the older generation's role within the text, however, the reader finds that they dominate much of the description of the novel's first three parts and the "Appendix." Further, in as much as the novel tells the story of the Compson family decline within the failure of the younger generation, it also tells the story of the parents, Jason Lycurgus III and Caroline, and the uncle, Maury Bascomb, achieving a whole greater than the sum of the novel's subjective parts. By examining the ways that Faulkner unifies and orders the text, the reader can also see the intense and even paradoxical relationship established between the two generations where each serves to

define and frame the other. In examining the elements that order the text, the reader gains a more detailed understanding of the older generation as doubles and repetitive precursors to their offspring and in the process finds evidence pointing to an incestuous relationship, in spirit if not in reality, between Caroline and her brother Maury.

As a retelling of the fall, the fall of the individual, a family, and metaphorically that of a region, Faulkner demonstrates in the Compson children the movement from innocence to experience, sin, and decay. From the beginning of the novel, however, the reader finds a lost generation in the older Compsons one stagnate in defeat and failure. The fall of the younger generation, therefore, both presupposes and suggests that of the older, establishing a parallel and chronological connection between the two generations. In conjunction with the ordering elements, moreover, specific textual references also allow greater insight into the older generation, linking Mr. Compson and Quentin, Mrs. Compson and Caddy, and Uncle Maury with Jason. In addition to the use of doubling, like that described by John Irwin in Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge, Faulkner further points to an incestuous relationship between Caroline and her brother, Maury, with the possibility of either Jason and/or Benjy resulting from the union. Ultimately, if The Sound and the Fury tells of the fall of a once-great Southern family, then logically, the fall of Jason III, Caroline, and Maury, in particular, exists somehow embedded within and parallel to the surface of the narration, casting

its foreboding shadow over the Compson children.

To understand the role of the older generation and its relationship with the four offspring, the reader needs to understand the ways that Faulkner generates meaning as he orders and unifies the text. Confronting the modernist problem of creating meaning, order, and unity out of the fragmentation and subjectivity of individual experience, Faulkner manipulates four specific elements, both thematic and structural, to order the narrative events. First, through his use of a fragmented chronology and problematic, subjective narrators, Faulkner demands a participative, active reader who must order and assemble the parts of the text, filling in narrative gaps and compensating for lapses caused by the failure of language. Taking Quentin and Shreve in Absalom, Absalom!, as a model for the reader of The Sound and the Fury, the reader must use the parts of several disparate sources to create a whole greater than the sum of those parts by combining textual information and intuition. Second, in demonstrating the relationship between time and experience, Faulkner creates a paradoxical past that both deterministically overtakes and resides within the present, remaining constantly subject to revision and redefinition. Framed within the present, however, Faulkner's past remains layered and active beneath the surface of temporal experience, leading up to and defining that moment. Third, repetition and doubling within the text create meaning and significance within, across, and between the two generations, breaking down the chronological order

and allowing each generation to simultaneously define the other. Fourth, as a catalyst for the fall, Faulkner uses the theme of incest to unify further the individuals within and across the generations, engaging classical and Christian mythology and conflating the fall of the Compson family with the metaphorical fall of the Old South.

II. The Reader and the Text: Faulkner's Model

To discover fully Faulkner's ordering of experience, the reader must first understand his or her relationship to text in the active, participative role assigned by its author. During a classroom interview at the University of Virginia, Faulkner alludes to the gaps, or "failure" (Gwynn, 61), of meaning inherent to The Sound and the Fury, those created through the breakdown of both language and experience and the author's inability to express accurately one in terms of the other. In a later session, describing the subjective nature of experience and the fragmented immediacy with which his characters perceive it in Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner notes, "I think that no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it. Someone else looks at it and sees a slightly awry phase of it. But taken all together, the truth is in what they saw though nobody saw the truth intact" (Gwynn, 273). Further, however, Faulkner discusses the interactive role of the reader in bridging the textual gaps, noting that the voices within the text, the perspectives of his characters, represent "thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird. But the truth, I would like to think, comes out, that when the reader has read all these thirteen different ways . . . , the reader has his own fourteenth . . . which I would like

to think is the truth" (Gwynn, 274).

In Quest for Failure Walter Slatoff suggests that Faulkner creates an uncentered fiction which forces the reader "to search for pattern and significance" (153) in his novels. Allowing for a "number and variety of possible interpretations" (155), the author, as alluded to earlier in his own comments, makes the reader an active participant in the text for two basic reasons. First, because Faulkner treats reality as a whole greater than the sum of its parts, both language and the subjective nature of individual experience, in accordance with the modernist perspective, fail to adequately express that totality. The text stands as an apparent jumble of fragmented, individual impressions, composed in prose seemingly unbounded by expected syntax and form; the reader, therefore, must fill in the resulting gaps and holes. Second, Faulkner viewed the novel as being open-ended, something subject to change, a growing entity. In Absalom, Absalom!, however, the author provides a model of reading and interpretation, demonstrating the role that the reader must assume and how he or she must assemble the text and recreate order.

Within the apparent chaos of the text, the failure of language to impose order reflects the essential difficulty Faulkner's characters have in organizing and assimilating raw experience. In the first section, Benjy's consciousness weaves his immediate impressions with his involuntary memory, mixing the past and present in an undifferentiated and unceasing current moment. From the perspective of the

past, Quentin submerges himself in a fusion of the images of his suicidal last day and an internalized, stream-of-consciousness dialogue with his father. In the third section, Faulkner remains on the surface of experience, reporting only its concrete aspects through the cynical perspective of Jason. Essentially, as John Matthews in Faulkner and the Lost Cause observes, Faulkner calls "attention to the disparity between the artistic rendition of experience and the unceasing flow of experience itself" (119). Describing the process that brings together the subjective points of view and overcomes the relative failure of language, Andre Bleikasten highlights the reader's role:

> The point . . . is that the story is both told and not told, that while by the novel's ending we are in possession of all the facts we need to reconstruct the Compson chronicle, the final truth of the matter is as conspicuously elusive as ever. What engages us is not so much the tale as the hazardous, reiterative, never completed business of its tellings . . . . Pointing toward a world beyond itself which language fails to encompass and articulate, [the novel] summons us time and again to measure the gap between what is said and what is meant, between what is meant and what simply is: opaque, unaccountable, inexpressible reality, as innocent of significance as 'a tale told by an idiot.' (1982, xxi)

Through the inherent separation caused by a narrative with numerous, disparate perspectives, both Faulkner and his critics have noted the novel's "open, uncompleted structures" (Bleikasten 1984, 12), pointing to the need for the reader to fill in gaps and provide closure. "To read The Sound and the Fury, is first and foremost to participate in an ongoing process, not to consume a finished product" (1984, 5) suggests Bleikasten; ". . . the patterned incom-

pleteness . . . waits for readers and requires their active participation . . . . [within the text to] take part in the unending process of its production. Reading and rereading the book, they will write it again" (1990, 145). Faulkner himself viewed his literature as a dynamic process, one subject to redefinition and changing perspectives. While on a cultural exchange to Japan, Faulkner referred to the story as "one I wrote five times and it's still not finished" (Jelliffe, 162). Malcolm Cowley further distinguishes between the fixed world of the novel's present and its expanding, open-ended past, noting in the introduction to The Portable Faulkner, "the novel that Faulkner wrote about the Compsons had long ago been given its final shape; but the pattern or body of legend behind the novel--and behind all his other books--was still developing" (xv). Referring to the imaginative cosmos of Yoknapatawpha County, Carl Rollyson observes:

> . . . the author feels that his knowledge of his imaginative world is progressive; that world is continuous and alive and coherent because he has not ceased to see it dynamically, from new and more mature perspectives. (160)

Recognizing the interactive role of the reader in bridging the fragmented and disparate individual perspectives, Andre Bleikasten states:

> Reading Faulkner is not a matter of acquired skills, but of skills to be acquired . . . . For ours is the task to dispel the obscurities, to remove the ambiguities, to fill in the gaps, to reassemble the fragments, and so to restore the textual web to consistency and wholeness. (1984, 11)

Faulkner, however, provides an example of the method from

which the reader must approach the text in his later novel, Absalom, Absalom!, illustrating a model of active reading and interpretation. Like Shreve and Quentin, the reader must take the fragments of a story funneled through the subjectivity of the tellers and create a greater whole out of those parts. Using intuition, inference, knowledge, and an active imagination, Quentin and Shreve approach the Sutpen story from the perspective of a "jigsaw puzzle" (AA, 313) and, like detectives, create a continuity of time and action, inventing motives and detail as needed to fill the story's blank spaces.

While appearing as marginal figures on the surface, Quentin and Shreve dominate the later novel as the definers and assemblers of a story bounded by a collection of impressions and askewed individual experience. Acknowledging the need for distance from the immediateness of raw sensory data, Quentin notes, "If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain" (AA, 190). Only through this deliberate distance, or space, does Faulkner distinguish between the fragmentation of immediate, personal experience and time and that of a more objective, linear chronology. The participant, therefore, only knows and processes the immediate sensory data, measured against his or her past, whereas the reader can rearrange the narrative information into a chronological or historical time. Like Quentin and Shreve, Faulkner forces the reader into the role of creator and participant, one initially distanced from the characters and events of the text, to fill in and sort out the gaps created

by the subjective, disparate viewpoints, and provide closure to the Compson story.

Summarizing the need for the reader's "intense emotional involvement . . . [and] intellectual participation" (Bleikasten 1984, 12), Carolyn Porter notes:

> . . . [Faulkner] forces the reader to share the burden of narrative construction actively. That is by casting the novel's central action as an exercise of the imagination in narrative construction, Faulkner implicates his reader as a participant in the telling of a story, a strategy which serves to alter the reader's relation to the novel . . . . (Porter, 58)

In arriving at the whole from the parts, however, the reader must make a "leap of the imagination" (Waggoner, 163), using intuition and logic to fill in gaps where no narrative information exists. As a factor that problematizes the text, the past remains subject to redefinition and reinterpretation because ". . . meaning is neither given nor entirely withheld. It must be created by imagination and faith. Historical meaning is a construct" (Waggoner, 168), a conflation of individual experience.

Although they appear incidental to the narrative action, the older generation of Compsons and Bascombs and their undisclosed pasts, in their relationship as a part to the whole, create gaps throughout the text. In the language of the deconstructionists, that very absence marks and implicates its importance. Faulkner, therefore, imposes upon the reader the necessity to assemble the parts of their story. But then, what does Faulkner really tell his readers? He states no facts, rendering a series of raw impressions and experiences in a language that disassembles

and contradicts itself. Like Quentin and Shreve, the reader becomes co-creator, an active participant in assembling and interpreting events within the text. Provided only limited access to the details expressed in the novel's given world, the reader must look within the story of the Compson children to find that of the parents and the uncle. As a result, like in Absalom, Absalom!, the greater, dominating past emerges only out of the reader's ability to assemble and impose order and closure upon the fragmented and subjectified chaos of the given world in the novel. To assist in this process, however, Faulkner provides the reader with the three previously mentioned textual ordering elements: the author's vision of an ever-present past, the use of repetition in creating significance and meaning, and the thematic role of incest within the text.

III. Time and the Ordering of Experience

As a central thematic and ordering element within The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner's use of time and the relative nature of experience add to and substantiate the impact of the older generation upon the younger. Importantly, the idea of an ever-present past dominates Faulkner's writing, shaping every facet of the thoughts and actions of his characters. Whether labelled as familial or cultural influence, psychological obsessions, or simply fate and determinism, the past serves as both the measure of and motivator for successive generations, creating the present moment out of the sum of those preceding it. For Faulkner, moreover, experience splits into two planes, an individual and a collective or historical. On the individual level, experience becomes a jumble of fragmented, real-time sensual perceptions judged by the individual's knowledge of the past, both private and public. On the collective level, experience serves as a collage of individual perspectives, where viewed by the reader from the distance, the whole assumes a form greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Describing the chronological essence of experience, Faulkner conceptualizes time as an asynchronous, interactive element that determines the present through an active, ever-encroaching past. In a much cited passage from Absalom,

Absalom!, Faulkner uses a metaphor of water, the womb, and the umbilical cord to illustrate the connection between the past and present:

> Maybe nothing ever happens *once* and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter; that pebble's water echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm . . . . (261)

The past, therefore, reaches into the present, becoming a determining force subject to redefinition and manipulation by those it influences. In a discussion at the University of Virginia, Faulkner points to the actions of the past, the influence of previous generations, as a deterministic force impacting upon those succeeding it, stating:

> . . . that's the mystical belief that there is no such thing as was. That time *is* (editor's emphasis throughout), and if there's no such thing as *was*, then there is no such thing as *will be*. That time is not a fixed condition, time is in a way the sum of the combined intelligences of all men who breathe at that moment. (Gwynn, 139)

Commenting upon Faulkner's perspective, Hyatt Waggoner notes that not only is the past present in the now, "the past is still alive, still with us, demanding to be understood" (163). Describing how the past remains alive in the present, James Miller goes even further and describes time as existing in layers, noting that:

> Central to Faulkner's vision is the impingement of past on the present, . . . designed specifically for explorations in depth of the layers of time that lie below a particular and usually startling event of the present.

Further, Jean-Paul Sartre, in "On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner," observes that the "layers of time" generate order, operating like a Chinese box:

> As soon as we begin to look at any episode, it opens up to reveal behind it other episodes, all the other episodes. Nothing happens; the story does not unfold; we discover it under each word, like an obscene and obstructing presence, more or less condensed, depending upon the particular case. (87)

While the present exists as a result of the actions and forces of the past, the reader paradoxically discerns the past only by recovering it from the present or given world of Faulkner's novel.

In referring to the relationship of the past and present, moreover, Faulkner distinguishes between two types of experience, the individual and the collective, or historical, differentiating them through the perspective and the use of the past. Sartre, in another famous passage, describes the relationship of past and present in the formation and solidifying of the two types of experience:

> Faulkner's vision of the world can be compared to that of a man sitting in an open car and looking backwards. At every moment, formless shadows, flickerings, faint tremblings and patches of light rise up on either side of him, and only afterwards, when he has a little perspective, do they become trees and men and cars. (89)

Specifically, within the forward movement of the individual in time, raw experience generates no inherent meaning within its immediate context and can gain significance only when placed within a larger perspective of the past. Unable to escape subjectivity in the present, Faulkner's characters only know the past, generating personal meaning by placing

their immediate perceptions against those already referenced and formed. As a result, the past becomes an active, ongoing process or force within the lives of his characters, influencing their actions in the present. Describing the connection between the individual and the past during a discussion at the University of Virginia, Faulkner observes:

> . . . no man is himself, he is the sum of his past. There is no such thing really as was because the past is. It is a part of every man, every woman, and every moment. All of his or her ancestry, background, is all a part of himself and herself at any moment. And so a man, a character in a story at any moment of action is not just himself as he is then, he is all that made him . . . . (Gwynn, 84)

Individual experience, that composed of fragmented sensory impressions, becomes relevant only when judged against the individual's knowledge of the past. However, the collective, or historical, past rises out of individual experience, formed through a process of merging and collation. Paradoxically, the collective and individual in essence mutually define and shape one another. Faulkner illustrates the concept during Quentin's internalized dialogue with his father; in it, Mr. Compson relates the inherent problem of meaning and the paradox of time and experience:

> . . . was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until it was . . . . (SF, 222)

Bringing together Faulkner's layering of time with the fragmentation of experience, James Miller describes the ordering technique which demonstrates the influence and relationship of the past with the present as a "vortex of

time," observing that it:

> . . . is [a] . . . major instrument used for the probing of time, backwards and forwards, in the search for the complex mysteries of both causes and consequences invariably intertwined in one vital and enigmatic and frequently tragic event . . . . In a sense, then, each one of Faulkner's novels represents a descent into the vortex of time, a vortex created by an event that disturbs, upsets, alarms, or frightens the family or community. In moving frantically back and forth in the search for the causes and consequences of this key and singular event, Faulkner creates the structure of his novels: a whirlpool or circular structure suggesting that the secret of time (or life) is not to be found in the simple, straight chronology of one event following another, but rather in hidden corners (or pools) of the past, with only remote or oblique or subterranean (umbilical water-cord) connections with the event of the present being probed. If we are to understand why or how things happen, Faulkner seems to be saying, we must look at time, and the past, in all its infinite complexity . . . . (53)

The past, therefore, as the only measure by which the individual can measure the present, assumes a living, active role, providing a framework and filling in the gaps of the individual's immediate experience. As Sartre notes:

> The past takes on a sort of super-reality; its contours are hard and clear, unchangeable. The present, nameless and fleeting, is helpless before it. It is full of gaps, and, through these gaps, things of the past, fixed, motionless and silent as judges or glances, come to invade it. (89)

The past comes not only to dominate, but makes experience out as circuitous. Illustrating the essential paradox of the past and present in the novel, Carl Rollyson observes:

> . . . we must 'move in a circle' always reinterpreting the past; for contemporary man, in Faulkner's view, is forever recapitulating and reforming the past in new ways and in new contexts that accord with his present sense of himself. (15)

If the past holds such great influence over the present, then the lives of Maury Bascomb and Mr. and Mrs.

Compson, their successes and failures, somehow determine and form those of their offspring. Faulkner's paradox, however, perhaps the fundamental problem of modernism, creates a present which relies upon the past for definition. Although making this assumption, he gives the reader only the events of the novels present, framing the past with that present and reversing the chronological order of experience. As Perrin Lowrey observes:

> Faulkner gets what might be called 'suspense in reverse'--instead of wondering what will happen in the future, the reader wonders what has happened in the past and puzzles over making the proper connections. (61)

While the past underlies and orders the present and thereby gives it meaning, the reader only knows the present and must dig beneath its surface to discover the determining past. In essence, if the sins of the father can impact upon and determine those of the son, then conversely Faulkner creates the possibility for the sins of the sons, in the case of the Compsons, to reflect, point to, and define those of their parents. Similarly, the fall from innocence of the younger generation implies the fall of the earlier Compsons in that "tragedy is second-hand" (SF, 43), passed down from generation to generation. In creating this paradoxical relationship between the past and present, Faulkner gives the active, participative reader a tool to reconstruct the various perspectives as well as a means to look into the Compson past and define it in terms of the novel's given world.

IV. Repetition and the Doubling Between Generations

In addition to the "vortex" or "suspense in reverse" created within the merging of the past and present, Faulkner also uses repetition and doubling to connect and broaden further the relationship between the generations of Compsons. In his essay "Faulkner's Art of Repetition," Donald Kartiganer considers the function of repetition within the creation of meaning and significance:

> In its most ancient forms repetition is preeminently the way of knowing, the way of experiencing reality and significance. . . . [An act] does not truly *mean* (Kartiganer's emphasis), it is neither human nor real, until it achieves the status of the sacred by being recognized as the repetition of an earlier act. (23)

In this way, assuming the human capability for memory, the past interacts with and potentially dominates the present, acting as the gauge by which an individual judges temporal experience. In The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Milan Kundera considers Nietzsche and the role of repetition in establishing meaning as he writes, "Einmal ist Keinmal. . . . What happens but once, says the German adage, might as well not have happened at all" (8). Not only does the present, the individual's collection of raw experience and subjective impressions, ultimately rise out of comparison with the past, but an act, any act, becomes a meaningless and unbounded anomaly without the potential for repetition, without the interaction between the present and the past.

Throughout The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner's use of repetition generates meaning and perspective while providing another link between the past and the present. Recognizing its dominant role in Faulkner's works, Kartiganer observes:

> Repetition is our disease, our compulsion to reenact endlessly old, forgotten desires, and our cure, compulsion redeemed into dialogue, in which we revise the past, retrieving new possibilities from determinate origins. . . . The fact of repetition seems to lie at the very center of Faulkner's fiction, as its art, its meaning, and the process of its formation. (1989, 21)

Empowering and revitalizing, repetition brings the past into the present, magnifying the layering or vortex effect within the text. As a story told from five different perspectives, Faulkner shapes the form of the novel itself around the repetition in the retelling of a story, constructing in the process a whole larger than its parts. In Faulkner and the Lost Cause, John Matthews describes the way that Faulkner uses repetition to express the intrusive and potentially destructive nature of the past and the ways it can invade the present. Referring to Quentin, he observes:

> This son of the South . . . cannot escape the conviction that the past is nothing but catastrophe--the catastrophe of the Civil War, slavery, aristocratic decline in the New South, and the humiliation of a ruined family. Like so many Southerners, Quentin sees nothing but a legacy of loss . . . . As Mr. Compson says, '*was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until it was*' [SF, 205]. But Quentin amends his father, '*Again. Sadder than was. Again. Saddest of all. Again*' [SF, 109] . . . . (Matthews, 62)

Though employing different forms of repetition, Faulkner uses it as an ordering technique to connect the novel's action along two axes of time and experience, one horizontal and the other vertical. Horizontally, time and repetition

connect the novel within the younger generation of Compsons. From the five perspectives comprising the text, the story emerges as that of the three brothers and their sister, detailing their decline and eventual demise. On a vertical level, however, Faulkner relates the decline of a family across time, making the last generation's fall representative of and parallel to those preceding it. Further, the fall of the Compson children serves as a retelling of the Christian fall. In relating the fall of a family, the story also functions on a larger, historical level, representing the demise of the Old South. As the novel's meaning and relevance expand across time, the story of the Compson children becomes not only the story of humanity, going from the particular to the general, but, in the way the past lies imbedded within the present, it also retells and reflects the story of their parents.

Considering first the horizontal level, numerous critics have duly noted the repetition of the subjective experience of each brother serving as a retelling of the basic brother-sister pattern of the novel. As Constance Hill Hall suggests, each of the brothers represents a type of Christian fall; Richard Feldstein suggests that each section represents a different aspect of incest with Benjy, Quentin, Jason and [Reverend] Shegog [acting] as the bodily, mental, material, and spiritual incarnations of incestuous desire" (96), respectively. Others have suggested that the three brothers represent each of the components of Freud's three-part theory of personality as well as manifestations

of the past, present and the future. The fact remains, however, that though the three brothers provide three retellings of the same story, they still remain horizontally focused around the same center, the same generation.

Within the horizontal framework, Faulkner employs repetition in a variety of forms. In one way, his use of language as repetition generates significance within the text, emphasizing specific elements and ideas. As an example, Quentin's question, "did you ever have a sister" (SF, 199) appears throughout the novel's second section, linking his experience on the day of his suicide with that of his childhood. It also serves to generalize all sisters, imposing Quentin's fundamental obsession upon each incidence of the relationship within the text. Jason's "ONCE A BITCH ALWAYS A BITCH" (SF, 223), referring to women in general, also appears in Quentin's confrontation with Dalton Ames where Caddy's lover says, ". . . theyre all bitches" (199). In the same sense, moreover, the act of telling, like that of writing, becomes a repetition as Faulkner retells the essential details within the novel five times from the five different perspectives.

Defined within the Freudian sense, much of the behavior displayed by the younger generation of Compsons also proves itself repetitious as a type of obsessive-compulsive behavior. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud's description of the "da-fort" game (14-17) points to the ways an individual seeks control or mastery of an experience, particularly an unpleasant one of the past, through the "reliving"

(Irwin, 78) of repressed materials. For Quentin, perhaps the most obsessed and driven character of the book, the attempt to defend the family honor with Dalton Ames manifests itself twice in his encounter with Herbert Head and his later pummeling by Gerald Bland. Further, his relationship with Caddy replays itself later in his encounter with the Italian girl, complete with a double of Quentin in the girl's older brother. His attempt to cleanse himself and Caddy in the creek branch underlies his leap into the Charles River. As a summary, Andre Bleikasten observes:

> . . . time, in [Quentin's] experience, is endless doubling and repetition. No fresh starts, no real beginnings, are allowed; the present moment always reenacts the past, as though time were bedeviled by memory. Not that the past is ever recovered and repossessed in Proustian bliss. Whenever it returns, it is in the mocking guise of shabby travesty. (1982, xiv)

Similarly, the later behavior of both Benjy and Jason also demonstrates itself as rooted in the experiences of their youths. For Benjy, whose limited perception traps him within a timeless present, Faulkner's absolute fusing of the past and present causes him to repeat and relive certain experiences with the introduction of particular stimuli through involuntary memory. Hearing "caddie" on the golf course (SF, 1) reminds him of "Caddy," recreating her loss and absence. His ritual of meeting Caddy at the gate of the Compson home repeats itself in his scaring the neighbor girl walking home from school, an event that leads to his castration. His uproar over going around the Confederate statue in the wrong direction demonstrates his obsessive reliance upon and expectations of repeated patterns of experience.

Without the ability to separate past and present, Benjy cannot distinguish between the elements of sameness and difference that permeate and determine experience. Similarly, Jason, as a child, shows his pettiness towards his siblings, using threats as a means of gaining control. As an adult, his true character shows through as he attempts to blackmail Caddy and control the actions of Miss Quentin. In an attempt to revenge the lost bank job from Herbert Head, Jason rationalizes stealing the money sent by Caddy to her daughter. However, as a repetition of that failure, his niece runs off with the carnival man, taking not only the money rightfully hers, but some actually saved by Jason himself (Appendix to SF, 421-22).

Concerning the use of vertical repetition, that which occurs across generations, Faulkner not only parallels the younger and older generation of Compsons, but also uses historical and mythical models as types of doubles. On an intertextual level, Faulkner uses both Christian mythology and the historical to illuminate and define, through analogy and comparison, the action and repetition of The Sound and the Fury. By connecting the novel with Absalom, Absalom! through the use of common characters, the reader gains access to another set of textual possibilities through the conflicts involving the relationships of Judith and Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon, retelling the familial decline of the Sutpens. Additionally, the theme of incest and brother-sister relationships finds another outlet in the biblical story of Tamar and Absalom from which the title of the later

novel derives. Other biblical imagery surrounding the fall of humankind and the banishment from paradise underlies the basic story of the novel through childhood encounters with death and sexuality involving Caddy, "the little girl who had muddied her drawers and who was climbing up [a tree] to look in the window where her grandmother lay dead" (Gwynn, 17). Faulkner's use of Christ imagery permeates the text in Benjy being thirty-three years of age, his innocence and guiltlessness, and his destruction at the hands of others. Historically, as noted before, the demise of the family represents and interacts with the decline and fall of the South as a region and way of life.

As another consideration, the reuse of names from one Compson generation to the next provides a linguistic repetition, or doubling, that connects the present with the past, the younger with the older, and the living with the dead. As John Irwin notes:

> . . . in the decaying, aristocratic families like the . . . Compsons, the given names of the male descendants tend to alternate between two possibilities from generation to generation . . . . This alternation is one mark of the inbred character of these families and of the way that the locked-in repetition of traditional patterns has made them unable to cope with changing times. (64)

Similarly, Arthur Kinney suggests a psychological connection, observing that the repetitive use of names indicates the family's "compulsive and obsessive need to look inward and backward, its steady myopia" (159).

While names provide a symptom of the Compson inability to escape the past, the essential failure of the family,

that flaw which leads to their demise, somehow exists and perpetuates itself from generation to generation. In an interview at the University of Virginia, Faulkner describes the generational link concerning the failure of the family:

> The action as portrayed by Quentin was transmitted to him through his father. There was a basic failure before that. The grandfather had been a failed brigadier twice in the Civil War. It was the . . . basic failure Quentin inherited through his father, or beyond his father . . . . [S]omething had happened somewhere between the first Compson and Quentin. The first Compson was a bold ruthless man who came into Mississippi as a free forester to grasp where and when he could and wanted to, and established what should have been a princely line, and that princely line decayed. (Gwynn, 3)

As Warwick Wadlington observes, with the names come a mindset of failure, a failure of "blood" that undermines the familial line:

> [The reader is] . . . presented not the debilitating awareness of an ancestral father but a structure of consciousness inherited all too faithfully from him and his like, with the decay of the family line intrinsic in it. (71)

The most important aspect in connecting the generations occurs, however, in Faulkner's use of the older and younger Compsons as doubles of one another. As doubles, the connections between Quentin and his father, Caddy and her mother, and Jason with Uncle Maury particularly stand at the forefront of the text, demonstrating the "remorseless pull of the past towards repetition" (Kartiganer 1982, 382). In this doubling, moreover, Faulkner again confronts the reader with the paradox of the reverse ordering of the text. Having only the novel's given present, the collation of the subjective, narrative experience, the reader must recon-

struct and infer the defining and intrusive past, that which has led to and controls the present. By doubling the two generations, Faulkner reemphasizes this paradox as he frames the older generation--that which in actuality determines and defines those that follow it--with the younger, the generation that allows the reader access into the world of the parents and uncle. In showing the demise of the younger generation, Faulkner gives insight into the fall of the older; the doubling of Compsons and Bascombs makes the connection even more distinct.

A. Quentin and Mr. Compson as Doubles

Of all the characters in the novel, Quentin and his father stand as the most obvious doubles in their shared philosophy of life, their reaction to Caddy's promiscuity, their self-absorption, and their eventual self-destruction. Summarizing the relationship, Andre Bleikasten notes:

> To Quentin, Mr. Compson is not the expected antagonist, but a fraternal double with nothing to offer but the sour, self-conscious rhetoric of rationalized impotence. Father and son are secret sharers in defeat, and the argument between them echoed in the second section suggests not so much a duel as a doleful duet: their voices blend so harmoniously that in the end they are all but one. (1982, xiii)

As parallels to one another, Quentin and his father exist disempowered and castrated, made impotent through the loss of familial and personal honor, resulting in a common strain of shame and, ultimately, escape. While the novel's second section illustrates the sequence that consumes Quentin, Mr. Compson remains ever in the background, yet another of the young man's haunting and tormenting shadows. Although the

reader hears Quentin, the father's voice dominates the son's interior dialogue, issuing forth a litany of stoicism and defeat. The failure of Quentin, as a process of the failure of the past, proceeds from Mr. Compson.

Perhaps above all, the loss of honor underlies the shared failings, values, and actions of Mr. Compson and his son. In Southern Honor, Bertram Wyatt-Brown describes the central importance of honor as the definitive element by which the white male judged behavior within the mind-set of the Old South. Defining shame as the opposite to honor, Wyatt-Brown outlines five areas by which public and individual judgment determined self-worth and public reputation, items "crucial in the formulation of Southern evaluations of conduct":

> (1) honor as immortalizing valor, particularly in the character of revenge against familial and community enemies; (2) opinion of others as an indispensable part of personal identity and gauge of self-worth; (3) physical appearance and ferocity of will as signs of inner merit; and (4) defense of male integrity and mingled fear and love of woman; and finally, (5) reliance upon oath-taking as a bond in lieu of family obligations and allegiances. (Wyatt-Brown, 34)

Wyatt-Brown's definition of honorable conduct serves as an excellent framework to follow Quentin's movement to self-destruction and to highlight the doubling by Mr. Compson inferred within the text.

In examining the loss of honor, the reader finds that the encounter between Dalton Ames and Quentin holds a central role within the text. Out of his inability to control his sister, Quentin attempts to maintain his archaic sense of family honor by standing up to Ames and either forcing

him out of town or engaging him in a duel. Failing in all five parts of Wyatt-Brown's definition of honorable conduct, Quentin shamefully relives the act in many forms throughout his section, having "passed out like a girl" (SF, 201) in his attempt to confront Dalton Ames. A factor in his later suicide, Quentin's failure to uphold the traditions of the past results in the his "loss of manhood" (Bassett, 414) or, from a psychoanalytic perspective, castration. As the root of his son's shame, however, Mr. Compson also fails to assume responsibility for the family honor and defend that of his daughter. Quentin gets the opportunity to fail only because his father has already failed; his father similarly fails in holding on to the essential failure of the Old South and its empty ideals:

> When [he] demands that his father act against the seducer Dalton Ames, Quentin, by taking this initiative, is in effect trying to supplant his father, to seize his authority. But Quentin's father refuses to act, and the sense of Mr. Compson's refusal is that Quentin cannot seize his father's authority because there is no authority to seize. (Irwin, 110)

Essentially, Quentin arrives at the same condition of failed honor and self-esteem as that held by his father. As the result of their shared failure, that of honor and the past, both resort to self-destruction--Quentin throws himself in the Charles River and Mr. Compson drowns himself in alcohol.

Within this framework of failed honor, the reader finds new insight into the father-son "self-absorption," of which James Miller contends that Quentin's "real passion is his identification with his father's philosophy of life's utter meaninglessness," symbolized in the passing on of the "an-

cestral watch" (Miller, 57), "the mausoleum of all hope and desire" (SF, 93). The watch, like tragedy, gets handed down from generation to generation, another example of repetition and continuation in the causality of the past. As doubles, that which the reader may say about Quentin, can ultimately be inferred about his father. Writing about such a relationship, Andre Bleikasten notes:

> What Mr. Compson represents to his son is all th[e] past, and through the past he has a hold over him . . . . Through his father, he is heir to the southern tradition, to its aristocratic code of honor and its puritanical ethic. When this pattern of values is passed on, however, it has already lost its authority . . . . Quentin's fidelity is an allegiance to values long dead, and in making them his he chooses defeat. The southern code has failed; the failure of tradition has become a tradition of failure. In refusing to break with it . . . Quentin can only repeat the fatal errors of his fathers. (1990, 85-6).

The question yet remains that if Quentin arrives at his self-destruction through the sense of a failed past, a failed Southern code, and a failed self, then what similar or parallel process has Mr. Compson undergone to provide such a model for his son? While the reader witnesses the fall of Quentin, that of Mr. Compson remains imposing yet unanswered. As the ineffective, withdrawn lawyer from a good but fading family in both The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!, he likewise has drowned in "the reducto absurdam of all human experience" (SF, 93). The reader finds both Quentin and his father bound up in their own failure. Mr. Compson's "slow suicide" in his "flight from reality and truth [becomes] in Quentin actual suicide, a refusal to undergo the ordeal of initiation into mature

knowledge and manhood . . ." (Kerr, 64). As a failed model, Mr. Compson stands as not only a source of but also a mirror for his son's failure. As doubles, however, in accordance with the reversed ordering of the text, Quentin's actions act as a reflection from which the reader can also infer and understand the experiences of his father.

B. Caddy and Mrs. Compson as Doubles

In doubling Caroline and Caddy, Faulkner places the two women in the center of both their respective generations and of the overall familial decline. At the same time, however, he defines the two women in terms of the roles they play in respect to the men around them, presenting them to the reader only through the subjectivity of others. Describing the women as destructive influences within the text, Leslie Fiedler notes that within much of Faulkner's fiction a "fear of castrating women" (320) proves itself a common theme. As an inversion of the mythic Southern lady, Caddy and her mother "turn out to be destroyers rather than redeemers, quicksands disguised as sacred groves" (Fiedler, 321). While existing as potentially negative forces in both presence and action, the two women remain very different in the way they behave and the ways they apparently perceive the world. The results of their interactions with the men in their lives, however, prove them very similar. Judged according to the way that others perceive them, the two stand as failed women, both in motherhood and as representatives of the Southern lady.

Since the publication of the novel, critics have taken

positions strongly condemning either Caddy or her mother as the responsible force behind the collapse of the Compson family. As doubles, however, they interchangeably fill the role of destroyer. In his article "The Breakup of the Compsons," Cleanth Brooks provides the traditional view of Caroline Compson and her role within the text:

> The basic cause of the breakup of the Compson family--let the more general cultural causes be what they may--is the cold and self-centered mother who is sensitive about the social status of her own family, the Bascombs, who feels the birth of an idiot son as a kind of personal affront, who spoils and corrupts her favorite son, and who withholds any real love and affection from her other children and her husband. Caroline Compson is not so much an actively wicked and evil person as a cold weight of negativity which paralyzes the normal family relationships. She is certainly at the root of Quentin's lack of confidence in himself and his inverted pride. She is at least the immediate cause of her husband's breakdown into alcoholic cynicism, and doubtless she is ultimately responsible for Caddy's promiscuity. (127)

As Kenneth Richardson notes, Mrs. Compson's "false pride poisoned the family . . . . [She] is the one who is characterized by selfishness and false pride . . . . a woman totally blinded by her all-encompassing self-interest (72).

Similarly, however, critics have also looked towards Caddy as the source of the family failure. Supporting this position and noting the central importance of lost honor as a result of the episode between Caddy and Dalton Ames, Giles Gunn states:

> This fact becomes apparent when we realize that the central event, or at least the originating event, in this book is not Damuddy's death or Caddy's dirty pants, but her affair with Dalton Ames. It is Caddy's transgression, her sin, which destroys the protective self-enclosure of the family's sense of honor and brings the outside world into the Compson family pattern. Each of the first three sections of the book is

> an attempt to come to terms with this intrusion, really violation, from within the family circle itself, from within the distorted perspectives of this decayed domestic society. (52)

Similarly, Constance Hill Hall, in Incest in Faulkner: A Metaphor for the Fall, introduces another metaphor describing the generational role of women, describing the three Compson brothers as a composite Adam (37) who fall as a result of their relationship with Caddy, their Eve.

In addition to the role of destroyer, Caroline and Caddy prove themselves doubles in failure, demonstrating their deficiencies as mother, mother-substitute, and wife. In the roles of mother and wife, both women, in one way or another, abandon their children and leave their husbands. "Neurotic, selfish, and self-absorbed, Mrs. Compson has literally and figuratively removed herself from her family; much of her time is spent lying in bed with camphor cloth to her head, her voice issuing plaintively 'from behind the door'" (Hall, 45). Likewise, "cast off by her husband" (SF, 247), Caddy leaves her daughter with her parents, the dysfunctional center of her own youth. As mother-substitutes, moreover, roles ironically cast upon one another through their inability and negligence, both Caroline and Caddy fail since those for whom they assume the responsibility also fail. Caddy acts as a mother-substitute for her three brothers, the role abandoned by her own mother. Arguably, from her failure to meet her brother's needs and expectations, Benjy gets castrated, Quentin commits suicide, and the embittered Jason doesn't get the promised bank job from

Herbert Head. Caroline, on the other hand, serves as the mother-substitute for her granddaughter whereby her failure as mother and wife repeats itself in Miss Quentin's escape from the brutality and debasement of the Compson household.

As a consequence of their other failings, both Caroline and Caddy fail to meet the expectations of the past and engage the cult of the Southern lady. As both a caricature of and spokesperson for the myth, Caroline makes it perfectly clear "that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not . . ." (SF, 127). While speaking the rhetoric of the myth, however, she lacks the defining support and warmth for her family, the endurance required to manage the household, and the ambition to see beyond her own pathetic well-being. Though Caddy shows a great deal of warmth and nurturing towards her family, her failure to adhere to the code of the lady--shown in her promiscuity, lack of fidelity, and absence of a chaste spirit and body--separates her from her siblings and daughter, causing her to be labelled a "fallen woman" (SF, 273). As evidence of her role as destroyer, moreover, neither woman wholly submits to the authority of the patriarchal society, though they pay it lip-service, ultimately substituting a type of matriarchy. As proof, in an "antithesis of the fecund and sterile" (Slatoff, 98), Caroline and Caddy prove to be fertile and regenerative, with the female line continuing on through Miss Quentin. The impotent Compson and Bascomb men, in opposition, spiritually and physically bring their family lines to an end.

C. Jason and Maury Bascomb as Doubles

Further linking the two generations of Compsons, Faulkner creates a third set of doubles in Jason and his uncle, Maury Bascomb. While Quentin and Mr. Compson parallel one another in spirit and thought, mired in a failed past and an inability to act against it, the nephew and uncle correspond to one another in their actions, holding in common a lack of honor and deep self-centeredness. Blind to ethics and morality, the pair appear shameless throughout the text, each looking to the future as they seek to acquire money in the present, desiring to better their prospects and status. Like Quentin and Mr. Compson, however, Uncle Maury and Jason also represent another aspect of sterility and impotence, standing in contrast to the fecundity of Caddy and her mother. As terminal bachelors, impotent and ineffective, they both prove to be the last of their respective family lines, or as Uncle Maury writes, "the sole remaining male descendant" (SF, 278).

With their minds set on their own welfare, Jason and his uncle reject the values of the community and the past from which it derives--the code and ethics of the Old South. As evidence, returning to Bertram Wyatt-Brown's discussion of honor, the reader finds that the pair not only lack honor but also lack any sense of shame. Their behavior, parallel in almost every way, appears to stem from their self-centeredness in their desire to accumulate both objects and money, something Maury refers to as the "solidification of [his] affairs" (SF, 278). Though speaking of his uncle,

Jason ironically sums up both of their situations when he says that "Uncle Maury would do anything for ten dollars" (SF, 256) in that the two men resort to any means possible to achieve their goals. Remorselessly, Maury and his nephew break their word, cheat, lie, and steal from everyone they know, particularly their friends and family.

In their most obvious disregard of the Southern code, both Maury and Jason fail to protect the ideal of womanhood, preying off of the dependency and financial ignorance of the Compson women. In an example, the uncle abuses the trust of Caroline, his sister, and uses her bank account as his own. A common practice, Maury draws "for fifty" (SF, 12) to buy himself things like the "black gloves" (SF, 245) that he wears to Mr. Compson's funeral. Like his sister, moreover, Maury pays lip-service to the illusion of the Southern lady, using his complements to indulge her at the same time that he steals her money. In the letter he sends to Jason telling of his latest get-rich-quick scheme, Maury writes:

> . . . knowing your Mother's delicate health and that timorousness which such delicately nurtured Southern ladies would naturally feel regarding matters of business, and their charming proneness to divulge unwittingly such matters in conversation, I would suggest that you do not mention it to her at all . . . . It might be better to simply restore this sum to the bank at some future date, say, in a lump sum with the other small sums for which I am indebted to her . . . . It is our duty to shield her from the crass material world as much as possible. (SF, 279)

In the "Appendix," Faulkner further highlights Maury's shamelessness, observing that he "borrowed money from almost anyone, even Dilsey although she was a Negro, explaining to her as he withdrew his hand from his pocket that she was not

only in his eyes the same as a member of his sister's family, she would be considered a born lady anywhere in any eyes" (SF, 423).

Similar to his uncle, Jason also pretends to look out for his mother's best interests by putting his paycheck into his mother's bank account on his "own accord" (SF, 281). In doing so, however, it allows him to steal the monthly checks and miscellaneous cash that Caddy sends her daughter, checks that Jason supposedly burns for the sake of his mother's pride (SF, 272-3). He also lies to his mother about the money supposedly invested in the hardware store where he works, having used the "thousand dollars" to purchase an automobile (SF, 284). Further, Jason blackmails Caddy, demanding money so she can see her daughter and so that he won't "tell Mother and Uncle Maury" (SF, 256). Recognizing her brother's essential greed, selfishness, and lack of honor, Caddy, when asked by Jason whether she trusts him, answers, "No, . . . I know you. I grew up with you" (SF, 253). Even in business ventures, like his uncle's undisclosed scheme to get rich, Jason uses part of the money that he takes to play the cotton futures (SF, 237-40) with the hope of making it financially and not having to work for it.

Aside from the issue of money, Faulkner constructs another parallel and repetitive situation that links Jason and his uncle through their interactions with the Pattersons, the Compson family's next-door neighbors. As a result, both must fight with a member of that family over an issue of honor, suffering a physical beating and humiliation

in the process. In Maury's case, while having an affair with Mrs. Patterson, the woman's husband intercepts a love letter sent to her through Benjy and Caddy, whom the uncle instructs "to give it to her without letting anybody see it" (SF, 13). While "Maury says he's going to shoot the scoundrel" (SF, 52), referring to Mr. Patterson, he eventually ends up with a much deserved pummeling, having insulted the honor of another and losing. Benjy provides the only commentary on the results of the event, saying, "Uncle Maury was sick. His eye was sick, and his mouth" (SF, 52). Likewise, Jason suffers the indignation of a "black eye" given to him by the smaller "Patterson boy" with whom he sold kites "until the trouble over finances" (SF, 217-18). Ultimately, the doubling of the uncle and nephew, demonstrated through their underhanded activities and subsequent punishment, provides another link to connect the two generations.

V. Incest as an Ordering Element

Having considered the devices used to order the text, the reader must still question the circumstances causing Maury Bascomb and Jason and Caroline Compson to become the ineffectual, failed individuals encountered in the text. Because Faulkner describes the fall from innocence that dooms the Compson children, the reader can connect that same process of decline and decay with the older generation through the elements that link the past with the present. In describing the vehicle for the family downfall, Richard Feldstein, in "Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury: The Incest Theme," notes that "[i]ncest has much significance for Faulkner. . . . as a thematic ordering principle" (88). Making similar observations focused on the Compson children particularly, John Irwin, using a psychoanalytic approach in Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge, and Constance Hill Hall, through a historical reading involving the Christian tradition in Incest in Faulkner: A Metaphor for the Fall, construct convincing arguments defining incest as the precipitous element causing the fall of the younger generation and the family's demise. With the tools and clues provided by Faulkner to approach the text, the reader, taking a leap of the imagination like Shreve and Quentin in Absalom, Absalom!, can infer based on available evidence,

that incest also stands at the center of the older generation's fall. As such, the incestuous triangle existing between Mrs. Compson and her brother, one that sexually displaces her husband, leads to the fall of the older generation and possibly results in the birth of either one or both of the two youngest children, Jason and Benjy.

As a background highlighting Faulkner's novel, incest has served as a common metaphor in Southern studies to describe the spiritual and intellectual condition leading to the fall of the South. Alluding to this presence in the Southern mind, Andrew Lytle observes:

> For many years it has seemed to me that incest was a constant upon the southern scene. There was plenty of circumstantial evidence. The boys' and girls' rooms seemed too obviously separated. I remember in old houses the back stairs with solid paneling to hide ankles and lower legs as the girls came down. Call it prudery, but what is prudery? The fear of incest, if incest it was, was perhaps not overt . . . . It was the incest of the spirit which . . . inhered within the family itself. I did not have to look very far, no farther than both sides of my own house, to know this. It was clearest in the country family, where the partial isolation meant an intimacy and constancy of association in work and play, which induced excessive jealousy against intrusion from the outside. (69-70)

Symbolically, Constance Hill Hall also connects the implications of incest with the other Southern themes of "alienation and isolation," "the preying of the past upon the present" (8), and, in equating the demise of the Old South with the loss of paradise, "as a metaphor for original sin" (11).

In turn, sociological and psychological studies lend further insight into the phenomenon and incidence of incest, pointing to the way it both appears across and connects

generations. In Totem and Taboo, Freud specifically addresses incest as an important element in sexual development, noting "that the earliest sexual excitations of youthful human beings are invariably of an incestuous character" (124). Similarly, studies suggest that most children engage in sexual experimentation and that brother-sister incest occurs on a scale much greater than reported because of the "close contact" (Finkelhor, 171-72 and 191). Alice Miller, examining the incidence of self-destructive behavior in For Your Own Good, suggests that families create taboos and define their own dysfunctional behavior, passing them down from parents to offspring. In such a way, other studies indicate that incest may also be a "transmissible phenomenon" (Berry, 157-61), one handed down from one generation to the next.

Although the sociological and psychological implications of incest in the South and society stand outside Faulkner's text, they provide an illuminating backdrop for other studies of the novel, particularly those of John Irwin and Constance Hill Hall. While identifying incest as an essential factor underlying the Compson family's demise, both authors focus on the Compson children, largely ignoring implications regarding the older Compsons and Bascombs. Their descriptions prove useful, however, in understanding the ways that incest operates within the text. Irwin, for example, uses Faulkner's idea of the past's ever-enclosing circles in Absalom, Absalom! as metaphor for how the self struggles and fails to break out of the generational

determinism:

> For Faulkner, doubling and incest are both images of the self-enclosed--the inability . . . of the individual to break out of the ring of the family--and as such, . . . appear in his novels as symbols of the state of the South after the Civil War, symbols of a region turned in upon itself. Thus, the temporal aspects of doubling and incest evoke the way in which the circle of the self-enclosed repeats itself through time as a cycle, the way that the inability to break out of the ring of the self and the family becomes the inability of successive generations to break out of the cyclic repetition of self-enclosure. (59)

To Irwin, therefore, the endless process of self-enclosure translates into "the image of the fate or doom that lies upon a family" (60), manifesting itself in the destruction of the three Compson sons.

In contrast to Irwin's psychoanalytical model, Constance Hall, drawing upon biblical imagery, states that "incest signifies a fall from wholeness, a lapse in which mind is sundered from body, thought from sensation" (17-18). In detailing the fall of the Compsons, Hall describes the essential role of repetition and the connection of generations through humankind's "propensity to sin," which "is bequeathed [from generation to generation], and hence the cycle of fall and punishment is endlessly repeated" (11). In particularizing her ideas to Faulkner's text, she summarizes the incidence of incest as a deterministic and ordering element:

> . . . in its function as a metaphor for original sin, it impresses upon us the ugliness of evil, alerts us to the need for change, and warns of impending harm. In The Sound of the Fury, where the theme pervades all four sections of the book and includes all five of the Compson progeny [Hall includes Miss Quentin], incest points to the pride, arrogance, and solipsism that lie

deep in the Compson clan and eventually destroy it. 62)

Arguing that the three Compson sons form one "Adam" (37), Hall contends that each brother represents an aspect in the retelling of the fall. Summarizing the larger implications, she universalizes her idea, contending that the Compson "parents, like Adam and Eve, have condemned not only themselves but also their children, and this sentence permits no escape . . ." (45).

While Irwin and Hall both show ways that incest operates within the text, they do so horizontally within the younger generation of Compsons, viewing the parents as the forces underlying their children's eventual decline. Considering incest in the ways Faulkner orders the text--the ways the past intrudes and imposes upon the present, the connections created in repetition and doubling, and the vortex of time as a model demonstrating the layering and reverse ordering of experience--the reader must consider its implications on a vertical level, within that of the older generation. In conjunction with the ordering devices, however, specific textual evidence points to an incestuous relationship between Caroline and Maury, one spiritual if not physical, providing an explanation for the withdrawn and bitter ineffectiveness of the parents and uncle, the disposition of Jason IV, and Benjy's retardation.

The potential for incest shows itself first within Mrs. Compson's references to the class differences between the Bascombs and Compsons and the special devotion she shows

towards Jason. In one instance, during an argument with her husband, Mrs. Compson challenges the way he treats Jason in comparison to the rest of the family. Pointing to a separate lineage, she says, ". . . you always have found excuses for your own blood only Jason can do wrong because he is more Bascomb than Compson . . ." (SF, 127). Along with this statement, Caroline draws a connection between Jason and his uncle when she notes, ". . . I know you dont love him [referring to Jason] that you wish to believe faults against him you never have yes ridicule him as you always have Maury" (SF, 128). Further, after his father's funeral, Jason recalls, ". . . Mother kept on saying thank God you are not a Compson except in name, because you are all I have left now, you and Maury . . . (SF, 244). In a similar situation, moreover, Mrs. Compson contrasts Jason with Quentin and confides to her middle son:

> Your are my only hope . . . . Every night I thank God for you . . . . Thank God if he (Mr. Compson) had to be taken too, it is you left me and not Quentin. Thank God you are not a Compson, because all I have left now is you and Maury . . . . (SF, 249)

Finally, describing Jason's working conditions, Mrs. Compson causes the reader to form major questions about her son's parentage as she says, "You know if I had my way, you'd have an office of your own to go to, and hours that became a Bascomb. Because you are a Bascomb, despite your name" (SF, 225).

On another level, Mrs. Compson shows a singular degree of partiality towards Jason, verging upon the obsessive, which suggests some deeper, more intimate bond with that

particular child. After discovering Caddy's pregnancy, for example, Mrs. Compson rages at her husband for the embarrassment it will cause the family. Seeking to remove herself from the supposedly failed Compson morality, Caroline displays her overt favoritism when she states:

> . . . I must go away you keep the others I'll take Jason and go where nobody knows us so he'll have a chance to grow up and forget all this . . . Jason was the only one my heart went out to without dread . . . . (SF, 126)

Later, distinguishing Jason from the other children, she again alludes to the possibility of incest, whether spiritual if not physical, exclaiming:

> . . . you must let me go away I cannot stand it let me have Jason and you keep the others they're not my flesh and blood like he is . . . I can take Jason and go where we are not known I'll go down on my knees and pray for the absolution of my sins that he may escape this curse try to forget that the others ever were . . . . (SF, 128)

Further, Mrs. Compson states, ". . . except Jason he has never given me one moment's sorrow since I first held him in my arms I knew then that he was to be my joy and my salvation . . ." (SF, 127). Similarly, she goes on to compare Jason with the others: ". . . he is the only one of my children with any practical sense you can thank me for that he takes after my people they [referring to Quentin, Caddy and Benjy] are all Compson . . ." (SF, 116).

Aside from her overt favoritism and references to name and blood, Mrs. Compson also links Jason with his uncle in the course of her conversations with her husband, making a greater effort both to support her brother and protect her middle son. Through mutual reference, for example, Caroline

tells her son, "They always looked on you and me as outsiders, like they did your Uncle Maury" (SF, 326). Even when she feels "sick," during the period when she would rather withdraw from her family entirely and hide in her bedroom, Mrs. Compson begins "staying downstairs . . . so Father couldnt kid Uncle Maury before Jason" (SF, 217). In addition to the other types of references that link the nephew and uncle, Caroline compares Jason with her brother and notes, "[y]ou have your Uncle Maury's temper" (SF, 277). Finally, despite the fact that she still has her daughter, granddaughter, youngest son, and the ever-faithful Dilsey, Caroline, after her husband's funeral, says to Jason, "you are all I have left now, you and Maury . . ." (SF, 244).

From another perspective, Maury's relationship with Caroline garners suspicion in the way that only he, out of the entire family, flatters and humors his sister's self-centered temperament and her delusions of being a lady in the Southern tradition. Throughout the text, he makes such comments as "You must keep your strength up" and "You'll worry yourself sick over him" (SF, 4), willingly playing into her self-pity and sense of personal suffering. After Mr. Compson's death, Jason describes the way in which his uncle tries to fill in for his father:

> Uncle Maury says "Now, now. Dont you worry at all. You have me to depend on, always," . . . Mother started crying sure enough, so Uncle Maury got in [the carriage] with her and drove off. He says . . . . I'll have to take your mother on . . . . (SF, 250)

Further, in the letter to his nephew that tells of his sure-fire business venture, Maury calls her Jason's "lady

mother," referring to her "delicate health and . . . timorousness" (SF, 278-9). Of particular note, Caroline defends her brother at every opportunity, the only person she refers to positively other than her son, Jason.

In another aspect, though largely ignored by critics in the past, the whole issue of Benjy's retardation conjures up a number of questions concerning the potential of incest and inbreeding. Even though the family's traditional, male names have been previously used, the fact that Caroline names her youngest son after her brother provides not only an obvious connection between Maury and Benjy, but additionally links Caroline with her brother. When she changes the boy's name from Maury to Benjy after discovering his condition (SF, 423), Mrs. Compson brings more suspicion upon herself and her motives as she then seeks to separate the child from her brother. Further, Mrs. Compson's obsession with guilt and punishment provides another indicator alluding to the possibility of incest. In several instances, Mrs. Compson approximates a type of confession, stating "I see now that I have not suffered enough I see now that I must pay for your sins as well as mine . . . " (SF, 127). Later, she specifically refers to Benjy as a type of "punishment" (SF, 126).

Arguably, Mrs. Compson's inability to act as a mother stems from the burdens she perceives herself as carrying--the personal sin of incest, the guilt from being the last of the Bascombs, envy and pride resulting from the Compsons' social status, and her lack of love for everyone except her

brother, Jason, and herself. Benjy, therefore, not only comes to represent the potential results of and punishment for inbreeding, but also the source and symbol of all her problems:

> I thought that Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me . . . . (SF, 127)

Providing an appropriate summary of the Bascomb's relationship and the position of the youngest son, Wendell Harris observes:

> [Benjy is] . . . the ultimate reduction of the helplessness of the mother's side of the family. Despite the mother's claims, it is not Jason IV who represents the Bascomb personality; Benjy's helpless idiocy is the radical exemplification of the parasitical nature of both the querulous mother and her irresponsible brother Maury. Thus are the inherent traits of the decaying families anatomized (140).

As a further connection defining the incest theme, Faulkner's pointed inclusion of brother-sister relationships and allusions creates another type of doubling within the text, linking Maury and Caroline with Quentin and Caddy. Aside from the parallel familial ties, some of the same phrasing used by Maury in referring to Caroline initially appears within the context of Quentin's conversations with or concerning Caddy, creating another example of verbal repetition. In particular, as Quentin tortures himself with an irrecoverable past and a sense of failed honor, he relives his physical and psychological defeat in the encounter with Dalton Ames, asking himself and his friends over and over, "Did you ever have a sister? did you?" (SF, 185). During his interactions with the little Italian girl,

demonstrated in "lower self-esteem" and other related problems (Finkelhor, 190). As an example of this type of conflict, Quentin's struggle with the sense of the failed past and honor, imposed upon his relationship with Caddy, similarly manifests itself in his movement towards suicide. In effect, therefore, Quentin may also serve as a double of his Uncle Maury in the way that they both become disempowered, potentially describing the process that consumes the uncle.

As another indication of the older generation's fallen condition, the reader finds Mr. Compson in a state of stagnation and resignation, withdrawn into his law offices with a bottle of alcohol and his volumes of classical writing. Representative of both his spiritual and physical state, Mr. Compson's stark cynicism and resignation shows in his belief:

> . . . that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not. (SF, 218)

Defeated, Mr. Compson finds life arbitrary and absurd, believing that ". . . a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would get tired, but then time is your misfortune . . . . You carry the symbol of your frustration into eternity" (SF, 129). If incest defeats and leads to the fall of Mrs. Compson and her brother, then it similarly provides an explanation for Mr. Compson's condition as the excluded and sexually usurped husband, serving also as the source of his strong disgust of women and lost

honor.

In his book Incest Behavior, S. Kirson Weinberg provides a possible explanation for Mr. Compson's lack of authority and honor through his discussion of the implications surrounding brother-sister incest. As a type of power struggle, Weinberg notes:

> When siblings persist in incest after one has married, the unmarried sibling then may compete with his (or her) spouse for married sibling's affection. Sometimes, the brother tries to disrupt his sister's marriage in order to renew the incest relationship unmolested by his brother-in-law. (169)

As a possible explanation, Maury and Caroline's incest has either physically or spiritually intervened between Mr. Compson's relationship with his wife, denying Mr. Compson in his role as husband and head of household and robbing him of his honor and authority. Rendered castrated and impotent, Mr. Compson's dark outlook on life gets placed within a new perspective, explaining in turn his cynical stoicism, his strong distrust of women, and his inability to act decisively.

From the perspective of Mr. Compson's deep misogyny and dark insecurity alone, the reader can assume that some important experience in the man's past has created this situation. Filtered through Quentin's consciousness, which in itself creates a repetition connecting and further doubling Quentin's struggle with that of his father, Mr. Compson describes love as a random experience of disappointment and frustration:

> . . . it is hard believing to think that a love or a sorrow is a bond purchased without design and which

> matures willynilly and is recalled without warning to be replaced by whatever issue the gods happen to be floating at the time no you will not do that until you come to believe that even she was not quite worth despair perhaps . . . . (SF, 221)

In a similar way, with Quentin's downfall reflected in his relationship with Caddy, Mr. Compson's parallel conception of the opposite sex indicates that some common, negative experience has intervened between his own youthful and natural innocence.

Telling of his distrust of women, denying them the possession of morality and ethics, Mr. Compson posits:

> . . . *Women are like that they dont acquire knowledge of people we are for that they are just born with a practical fertility of suspicion that makes a crop every so often and usually right they have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks in itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bedclothing in slumber fertilizing the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever existed or no* . . . . (SF, 119, Faulkner's emphasis)

Further questioning the ability of women to remain chaste and loyal, Mr. Compson states that "[w]omen are never virgins. . . . Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature" (SF, 143). Bitter and defeated, Mr. Compson's words conceal a past that dominates his perspective and interpretation of women:

> [virginity] . . . means less to women . . . . it was men invented virginity not women. . . . it's like death: only a state in which the others are left . . . . That's what's so sad about anything: not only virginity . . . . nothing is even worth the changing of it . . . . (SF, 96)

At the least, however, Mr. Compson's inability to act and his sense of failure and defeat originate out of his indeterminate past on both personal and historical levels.

A failed marriage brought about through the suggestion of incest provides one answer for his withdrawal into alcoholism and his dark stoicism--the two mechanisms that allow him to cope with his life. Indicative of his world view and his self-absorption, Mr. Compson approaches existence from a highly internalized perspective, one that shields the individual from the influence or intrusion of others:

> . . . we must just stay awake and see evil done for a little while . . . every man is the arbiter of his own virtues whether or not you consider it courageous is of more importance than the act itself than any act . . . . (SF, 219)

Completely desensitized to the positive and negative aspects of life, Mr. Compson attempts to educate his son and rationalize his own experiences by reducing and minimizing the effects of human action:

> . . . people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today . . . . (SF, 98)

If Mr. Compson stands ineffective and removed, in much the same way that Caroline and Maury appear in the text, then the failure somehow resides within their generation, just as it later manifests itself within the Compson children.

VI. Conclusion

Since the publication of The Sound and the Fury, critics have largely held the older generation of Compsons and Bascombs in contempt as marginalized and two-dimensional figures, viewing them as a prop used by Faulkner to support the story in the foreground. Although on the surface of the text they appear superficial and incidental, Mr. and Mrs. Compson and Maury Bascomb assume a more influential position when considered within the context of how Faulkner reproduces and orders human experience. In telling the story of the Compson children, the decay of a "princely [family] line" (Gwynn, 3), Faulkner confronts the reader with the novel's present, those events described within the five disparate, subjective perspectives. If indeed "[t]he past is never dead. It's not even past" (92), as Gavin Stevens says in Requiem for a Nun, then the story of the older generation of Compsons remains alive and relevant, embedded somewhere within the novel's given world, looming darkly within that present. In order to access that story, however, the readers must first gain insight into their role within the text and the ordering of Faulkner's cosmos.

In defining the reading experience of the novel, Elizabeth Kerr writes, "[i]t is the suspense of the jigsaw puzzle without a picture guide: jumbled fragments of information must be pieced together to discover what picture of

the past they form" (67). As the "puzzle" builder, the reader gets brought into the text in a very active and productive role, tasked by Faulkner to reassemble the disparate elements from the subjective retellings of the story. Defining the reader's presence as a type of synthesizing consciousness that collects and organizes his novel's distinctive voices, Faulkner observes, "I think that no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it. Someone else looks at it and sees a slightly awry phase of it. But taken all together, the truth is in what they saw though nobody saw the truth intact" (Gwynn, 273). Like Quentin and Shreve in Absalom, Absalom!, the reader must not only assemble the pieces of the given world of the Compsons, but must also use his or her intuition, common sense, and experience outside of the text to grasp its totality, making a "leap of the imagination." In Faulkner's terms, only the reader can discern the so-called "fourteenth image of that blackbird" (Gwynn, 274). Ultimately, in telling the Compson story Faulkner tests his abilities as a writer, the role of the reader, and the novel as a genre, confronting the problems inherent to existence in the creation of meaning, order, and unity out of the fragmentation and subjectivity of individual experience. In doing so, he asserts that historical or chronological time, a whole eventually created by the reader much greater than the sum of its parts, arises out of the mass of subjective, individual experience. As Malcolm Cowley observes, Faulkner "is trying to convey a sense of

simultaneity, not only giving what happened in the shifting moment but suggesting everything that went before and made the quality of that moment" (1966, 112). Faulkner's creation of experience, therefore, becomes "not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present, second by second" (Cowley 1966, 112). Within this framework, the older generation of Compsons and Bascombs, like the family past as a whole, assumes a much greater role as a deterministic and defining force, a fact obscured within the text's subjective narration. Because "man is the sum of his misfortunes" (SF, 129) and the product of the past in general, when considering the older generation of Compsons, the reader finds their story must not only precede that of the younger, but it must also somehow precipitate it, maintaining its presence like a shadow or a ghost.

As a paradox, however, while Faulkner asserts that the past makes the present, at the same time, as in the case of The Sound and the Fury, the present can also redefine and partially recreate the past. Even though the past determines the outcome of the younger generation, the children, as the given world of the novel, still provide the only access to that past for the reader. Creating a type of "suspense in reverse" (Lowrey, 61), Faulkner makes the reader question the past in determining what went wrong with the Compson family, particularly in the fact that most of the first three sections of the novel provide a recapitulation of Benjy's, Quentin's, and Jason's interactions with

their parents and uncle. Moreover, the use of repetition, both horizontal and vertical, and doubling further solidify the parallel relationship existing between the generations, allowing the reader to seek out the older Compsons' story and fill in the gaps created through the narrative subjectivity. Essentially, the overall effect of Faulkner's ordering of the text invites the reader to move forwards and backwards across the generations, making the younger Compsons serve as a defining and illuminating mirror for the older.

Within the ruins of the younger generation, therefore, remains fixed the demise of Mr. and Mrs. Compson and Maury Bascomb. In the same way Quentin receives his grandfather's watch through his father, the Compson family transmits its essential failure from generation to generation (Irwin, 64). Similarly, from a Christian perspective, as Constance Hill Hall observes, "[their] propensity to sin is bequeathed, and hence the cycle of fall and punishment is endlessly repeated" (11). In considering the role of incest as the thematic vehicle for the Compson failure, however, the reader finds not "the" solution, but "a" solution, one that uses the novel's given world to understand the imposing, ever-present past. In a text that creates more questions than it can possibly answer, the uncle and two parents stand as an enigma, existing central to the narrative events and yet remaining simultaneously absent from them, "like ripples . . . on water . . . moving on, spreading . . . [in a world where] nothing ever happens once and is finished" (AA, 261).

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