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"Contemplating an apotheosis" : Shakespearean influences on Faulknerian tragedy

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**"CONTEMPLATING AN APOTHEOSIS": SHAKESPEAREAN INFLUENCES
ON FAULKNERIAN TRAGEDY**

**A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts**

**by
Kevin P. Leal
December 1999**

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ABSTRACT

"CONTEMPLATING AN APOTHEOSIS": SHAKESPEAREAN INFLUENCES ON FAULKNERIAN TRAGEDY

by Kevin P. Leal

This thesis analyzes the textual and symbolic similarities between Shakespeare's tragedies Macbeth and Hamlet and William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! Faulkner absorbed essential characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy and utilized them, consciously or unconsciously, in the creation of his own tragic figures. Comparison between both writers' approaches to tragedy illuminates elemental similarities in Shakespearean and Faulknerian tragic heroes, most explicitly in the tragic protagonist's approach to environmental and psychological forces of non-being and negation. The tragic figure's choice of action develops from his belief in his own non-contingency, the erroneous conviction that he can conquer the forces of non-being with which he is in conflict. Though Faulkner's protagonists illustrate the ambivalence between the mores of the antebellum American South and the search for new values in the twentieth century, they essentially reflect the universal and perennial crises and conflicts explored by Shakespeare in Hamlet and Macbeth.

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"Contemplating an Apotheosis": Shakespearean Influences on Faulknerian Tragedy

Introduction

When speaking at the University of Virginia in 1957, William Faulkner was asked whether he had Oedipus from Sophocles' tragedy consciously in mind when he was creating the character of Joe Christmas. Faulkner explained how any similarities exemplified the "writer reaching back into the lumber room of his memory for whatever he needs to create the character or the situation, and the similarity is there but it was not by deliberate intent. It was by coincidence--not accident but by coincidence" (Gwynn and Blotner 72). Faulkner undoubtedly believed in the power of the subconscious to influence not only his characters' interactions with their present environments but also to affect the act of artistic creation itself. In her book Faulkner's Uses of the Classics, Joan M. Serafin writes, "In adapting the universal patterns of Joyce and Eliot, Faulkner achieved deeper meaning and used classical material to greater advantage than any previous Southern writer" (6). In addition to classical material, a major influence and resource for Faulkner's narrative art comes from Shakespeare. As Harold Bloom notes, the "influence of Shakespeare on our Chaotic Age remains persuasive" (Canon 70), and elements of Shakespearean tragedy are among the influential materials Faulkner found in the "lumber room" of his own consciousness. He believed, after all, that "Shakespeare was his yardstick, his casebook, and his competition" (Conley 85). Throughout his writing Faulkner returned again and again to Shakespearean thematic ideas, and, though usually quite subtly,

Faulkner often constructed his characters as Modernist shadows of Shakespearean predecessors.

Faulkner's incorporation of Shakespearean material into his oeuvre has not gone without notice. In his brief essay, "Resounding Fury: Faulkner's Shakespeare, Shakespeare's Faulkner," Timothy Kevin Conley notes,

For Faulkner, Shakespeare was not merely a part of his literary environment but rather the artist who had spoken to him in his youth and whose words he remembered in his maturity. When he wrote, Faulkner remembered favorite plays, lines, and characters. . . . And certain Shakespearean figures stand as models for Faulkner's characters: Hamlet, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Hotspur, Prince Hal, and Falstaff were his favorites. (121)

Conley's thoughtful overview, however, does not pursue analysis of particular works. He covers the range of Faulkner's career, showing Faulkner's conscious use of Shakespearean material and discussing Faulkner's earliest works, The Marble Faun, Soldiers' Pay, and Flags in the Dust, with the closest scrutiny. But he fails to go deeper than surface readings of Faulknerian characters and situations in his major works after this early period of Faulkner's work. While he gives attention to obvious borrowings, such as the title The Sound and the Fury, he does not probe deeper connections between Faulkner and Shakespeare. No other studies examine the whole of Faulkner's work in light of Shakespearean influence, and no in-depth study compares Shakespeare's and Faulkner's tragic visions in an extensive and thorough manner.

Twentieth-century perspectives on tragedy are concerned less with the Aristotelian requirements of tragedy concerning the tragic flaw, the unities, or the six parts of the tragedy (Aristotle 28), and more with man's doomed and futile quest to conquer death, to negate negation, an issue at the core of Faulkner's works throughout his career. Viewing Shakespeare through this

twentieth-century lens reveals that central to each of his tragic figures is a confrontation with non-being, negation or death, as well as a belief in non-contingency, the supposition possessed by the tragic protagonist that he can and should control forces around him in such a way as to bring about changes in the world, so that he might conquer negation and death (Hymas). In other words, Shakespeare's tragic protagonists confront an obliterating fate and, in response, try to control circumstances and people in order to avoid their own destruction. The belief in non-contingency is the illusion held by the tragic figure that he can sufficiently influence forces around him and that he can control his own fate. Yet, his actions achieve the opposite effect, initiating and completing his demise. Tragic figures need not have both qualities--the will to confront negation and the belief in non-contingency--to an equal degree. A character such as Hamlet may become obsessed with death but find he is impotent to bring about changes in the world. He may find he can do little to avoid his destruction, and this paralysis brings about his obsession with death or negation. Hamlet does believe, however, that he *should* be able to control forces surrounding him, and this belief brings him his most agonizing despair. He believes he should be able to act in the world but finds he cannot bring about the results he desires, nor can he avoid his doom. Hamlet and Macbeth initially seem to be vastly different tragic protagonists, yet both confront non-being and harbor, in differing degrees, a belief in non-contingency. Careful analysis of the two tragedies reveals most clearly these two elements at the heart of the tragic figure's consciousness. Macbeth most readily illustrates the tragic protagonist's belief in non-contingency, while Hamlet exemplifies the tragic figure's confrontation with negation. In addition, these plays are notably

and indisputably the two Shakespearean dramas most closely associated with Faulkner's art. Though it is clear that Faulkner was never concerned with fulfilling pre-established formulas when composing his novels, there are issues of negation and man's reaction to the inevitability of death to which Faulkner returned again and again throughout his career, and these issues are prominent in Shakespeare's tragedies.

Faulkner's tragic paradigm reflects an influence gleaned from Shakespeare's tragic protagonists. In The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!, in particular, Faulkner's truly tragic characters display both qualities outlined above. Faulkner's authentically tragic characters are those who have a more than passing conflict with negation and who believe that they should be able to act in the world in such a way as to emerge victorious from that conflict. The characters that most clearly reflect elements of Shakespeare's tragic protagonists are Quentin and Jason Compson, in The Sound and the Fury and Thomas Sutpen, Henry and Judith Sutpen, and Charles Bon, in Absalom, Absalom!. In The Sound and the Fury, Quentin Compson shares the introspective qualities of Hamlet, struggling to act in a corrupt world, while Jason Compson, with his irrational drive for control at all costs, especially over Caddy's daughter, is reminiscent of Macbeth futilely clinging to a sterile throne. Virtually all the major characters in Absalom, Absalom! have their ancestry in Hamlet and Macbeth, from Sutpen's Macbeth-like monomaniacal ambition to become the greatest of the Southern aristocrats to his children's doomed battle with the poisoned inheritance passed down from a materialistic and defeated landed gentry. The situations Faulkner's characters confront are similar to those confronted by Shakespeare's. They are all trapped in a world that is

controlled by forces and people from which the protagonists wish to escape. Both Shakespeare's and Faulkner's tragic heroes believe they can conquer these forces, and this belief leads them to their ultimate destruction. Faulkner's view of man's condition, however, is a conspicuously Modernist one. His characters struggle in "an unpredictable universe where nothing is ever stable," where moral values "remain in flux," where they confront "the ugly, the sordid, and the terrible" (Singal 12). The values of the Old South no longer apply, and no new values arise to give guidance or comfort to Faulkner's characters. This morass of a world that has moved on becomes the primary abnegating force Faulkner's characters confront. They cannot free themselves from either their own obsolete genteel sensibilities or the Modernist world that has seemingly rendered those sensibilities useless and impotent.

This Modernist world view colors Thomas MacFarland's analysis of tragedy. In "The Meaning of Tragedy," MacFarland states that "no tragedy can be conceived without the emphasized presence of non-being" (6), and though death is usually the culmination of the tragic figure's experience and it serves as the ultimate limit to our phenomenal existence, it is not, in MacFarland's view, non-being. MacFarland explains that "non-being is a process; non-being invades, rather than awaits, our lives" (6). He goes on to say, "The deepest paradox of existence resides in this fact--that non-being is both alien and integral to our lives. Our minds cannot work except by the simultaneous affirmation of being and non-being" (6). The tragic figure confronts the pervasive quality of negation by trying to conquer it; his actions stem from a belief in his own non-contingency, from his blind adherence to his own potentiality in the world: Oedipus runs from the oracle's prediction; Bosola, in

The Duchess of Malfi, makes a deal with Ferdinand; Romeo and Juliet marry in private; Ibsen's Halvard Solness builds the highest tower ever. The tragic figure strives to conquer not death explicitly but life where negation defines the mortality of man's experiences, what MacFarland identifies as "tragic tension," a tension that exists "between our knowledge of non-being and our need for being" (12). All of Shakespeare's tragic figures struggle with negation and believe that they can conquer it. They reflect the conflicts at the core of every sentient being's consciousness.

In the tragic hero we see "men like ourselves yet stronger than we could expect to be" (Leech 172). What makes the tragic figure greater than us is the distillment within him of the best and worst qualities of man: "However limited or expansive the view of human nature may be in a culture, its dominant traits can be concentrated and exaggerated in one representative man and thereby gain tragic potentiality" (Hymas 1). Shakespeare's tragic protagonists take the need for personal control over impersonal forces to the extreme: They attempt to vanquish completely the forces of non-being that pervade their mortal lives and are, through their keen wit, sharp intellect, or superior power, brought to their end. Shakespeare's tragic heroes possess the normal desire to conquer negation, but also possess greater skills, insights, and talents than the normal man. All of Faulkner's tragic protagonists reflect the same pairing of qualities. This pairing, this concentration of opposing forces is what grants the tragic figure his belief in non-contingency in a world dominated by the forces of eradication.

Chapter One: Shakespeare's Tragic Protagonist: Foundation for Faulkner's Tragedy

Like many of his contemporaries, Shakespeare viewed man as inexorably caught in the middle, possessing qualities of both ends of the Great Chain of Being. Man, with all of his tendencies toward violence, appetite, and indifference, had within himself the desire and will to transcend his deficiencies. Shakespeare took man for a passionate and impetuous middle ground between beastly impulses and godly apprehension. His most careful analysis of this condition occurs in the tragedies, where he focuses sharply upon an individual wrenched from the illusory security of well-defined social roles and thrown into the maelstrom of the two competing ends of the Great Chain. What remains, after this maelstrom has cleared all life from the stage, is the concept of man's doomed essence, his tragic spirit. The tragic figure erroneously believes that he can rise above his human rank into the realm of the gods where he can control all surrounding contingent forces.

The idea of the Great Chain of Being pervades the Elizabethan discourse on tragic necessity, most explicitly the competition between the two ends within the single human consciousness. The pervasive quality of the middle link on the Great Chain is that we can never reconcile or harmonize the two divergent ends of the Chain, the angelic or godly aspects with the animalistic or instinctual ones. We cannot eradicate one at the expense of the other, nor can we seem to make any progress up or down. We are stuck in the middle, forever attempting to mediate the forces and drives pulling us to become better than we can be or tempting us to become defiled and bestial. Corrigan may have this idea in mind when he states, "[S]elf-knowledge derived from the irreconcilable conflicts

within us is the very stuff of tragedy" (12), and later, "Man's tragic condition is that he is doomed by Fate to defeat because of the dividedness of his nature." (12). The tragic figure confronts contrary forces within his world and, more particularly, within himself, and through his efforts to mediate or conquer those contending forces, he is brought to his destruction. The confrontation with non-being illuminates not only external abnegating forces but also the internal conflicts that plague the tragic figure who is desperately trying to reconcile the divided impulses of his nature in his quest for complete security. The complicated commingling of the external and internal crises faced by the tragic figure spur his belief in non-contingency, his furious ambition to rise beyond the essentially conflicted nature of the human condition. The quest for certainty in the external world reflects his desire for harmony in the depths of his own consciousness.

Further complicating the tragic perspective is the fact that the tragic figure is often given, or forced to assume, a "privileged" view not granted to others within the community, shattering his own individual identity while demanding he forge a new one in a world ruled by the tragic sense of life. For example, at the beginning of the play Hamlet believes that he must serve the role of Gertrude's obedient son, remaining silent in a world that has "grown to seed." After he receives his father's "dread command" to revenge, he is forced to forge a new identity as avenger, becoming embroiled in the competing and chaotic forces of the world. The tragic figure, on the way to his new awareness of the competing forces in the world, is unfortunately brought to his destruction. Robert Corrigan summarizes this quality:

[T]he distinguishing characteristic of the tragic view of life is based upon the awareness that the central fact of the human condition is

that we always fall short. . . . The fact that our lives are defined by contradiction and paradox and that our experience of it defies all of our attempts to order and control it by rational means. (8)

At the end, the tragic hero realizes that no matter how strong his will may be, it can never match the forces of negation that ultimately vanquish all lives and ambitions. Shakespeare's tragic protagonists feel the grip of this awareness most painfully, and his greatest tragic figures all come, in the end, to an understanding of the futility of all their previous attempts to control their fates. Whether it is Macbeth's realization, ". . . be these juggling fiends no more believ'd, / That palter with us in a double sense; / That keep the word of promise to our ear, / And break it to our hope" (5.8.18-21), or Hamlet's declaration, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (5.2.10-11), Shakespeare's tragic figures do come to *anagnorisis* in the end. And though each one's recognition has about it different specific and situational elements, they all ring with the same truth, namely that there are forces beyond our control, and that these forces ultimately lead us to death. These forces are played out in the external world, but we come to recognize the paradoxical complexity of tragedy insofar as the essential nature of the tragic figure is what brings these forces into existence, whether it is Macbeth's ambition or Hamlet's indecision.

Shakespeare's tragic figure reacts to this internal war of the divided nature within his own consciousness in particular ways. First of all, he feels that he has, or should have, some control, some hold over the forces that surround him. The tragic hero either finds himself in a particular situation (Hamlet) or creates a situation (Macbeth), in which he feels that he can and must act in such a way to bring about successfully his own desired ends. Though the tragic

figure's goals are often quite specific, on a deeper, perhaps unconscious level, he is driven to apotheosize himself in the physical world, becoming a god complete with omniscience and omnipotence. He believes that he can act free from the contingent forces, usually unbeknownst to him, that are shaping his destiny. This belief in non-contingency is directly or indirectly a reaction to the presence or threat of non-being that looms over tragedy.

Shakespeare's treatments of Macbeth and Hamlet illuminate the points raised heretofore, and represent the two poles of Shakespeare's tragic continuum. Macbeth acts upon his basest instincts; Hamlet acts on his best intentions. Macbeth usurps power; Hamlet fails to do so. Macbeth is a short play with a flurry of activity and action; Hamlet is Shakespeare's longest play, and in it action is constantly interrupted with long speculations about philosophical verities. Macbeth is much more plot-driven, examining the process of one man's pursuit of power and potency; Hamlet is much more idea-driven, a subtle analysis of forces in the world that shape our ends.

Despite these differences, both aspects of the tragic paradigm, the confrontation with non-being and the belief in non-contingency, exist within the characters of these two plays. Macbeth, while contemplating negation only in the periphery of his thoughts, is most readily obsessed with action. He struggles in a chain of action and reaction, cause and effect, pausing only momentarily for contemplation of "dusty death." This is not meant to imply that non-being is of minor importance to him. It is of major importance, especially as it motivates Macbeth's violence. We might argue that his will to act is conscious, in the forefront of his mind, while the fear of non-being resides more towards the unconscious, the motivating force behind the scenes, the director and

playwright for the "walking shadow," the "poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage" (5.5.24-25). In fact, we might conclude that a major result of Macbeth's crisis is his recognition that life is a "tale told by an idiot . . . signifying nothing" (5.5.28). Hamlet, on the other hand, is completely obsessed with negation, and more importantly, negation's presence in the "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" world. Though he is also obsessed with his desire to act, his ruling passion is negation. This is what keeps him from acting. He is so concerned with the quality of his being in the presence of non-being, the forces around him from Claudius to Polonius to the strangling "unweeded garden" of Elsinore, that he cannot bring himself to act in definitive ways. And it is crucial to realize here that whatever we may speculate about as possible motivations for the actions that he does or does not take--whether we agree with his testing of the ghost and Claudius, his disregarded opportunity to kill Claudius, his elimination of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, or his willingness to participate in the fencing match--Hamlet himself believes for the entire first four acts of the play that he is not taking action and that he should be. Over and over in the play, Hamlet curses himself for not sweeping quickly to his revenge. Whether or not we condemn him for his delay, he repeatedly condemns himself. His confrontation between non-being and action is much more conscious than Macbeth's. Macbeth and Hamlet, while emphasizing differently the warp and woof of non-contingency and negation, nevertheless illuminate the fateful interaction between these concepts as they weave the complicated pattern of the tragic figure's consciousness.

In Shakespearean Tragedy, A.C. Bradley writes, "Macbeth is very much shorter than the other three tragedies [Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear], but our

experience in traversing it is so crowded and intense that it leaves an impression not of brevity but of speed" (291). Macbeth is a concentrated assault upon our senses. The sensation of speed is brought about through Macbeth's attempt to move from action to action free of the limitations of thought. He is a man obsessed with control. He demands it. We first hear of him from the Captain who reports to Duncan Macbeth's skill and bravery in defeating the traitors. The Captain reports:

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),
 Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
 Which smok'd with bloody execution,
 Like Valour's minion, carv'd out his passage,
 Till he faced the slave;
 Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
 Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops,
 And fix'd his head upon our battlements. (1.2.16-23)

Macbeth advances ruthlessly without pause. It is significant that Macbeth cuts off Macdonwald's head. Not only does this foreshadow the murder of Duncan (the head of the state) and foreshadow Macbeth's own end, but it symbolizes, within the Great Chain of Being, the decapitation of Reason when one succumbs to the bestial lust for power most grossly personified in betrayal. This is not to suggest that Macbeth does not think in the play, but Macbeth's thoughts are never clear because, after the initial murder of Duncan, Macbeth becomes obsessed with control, and like Oedipus, he believes he has the whole picture. Both Macbeth's and Oedipus's ability to reason becomes defiled as a result of their actions, leading them to make decisions from distorted perspectives. Though the audience knows one thing, the tragic figure, especially Macbeth or Oedipus, believes the opposite, making choices that bring about his destruction rather than avoiding it.

When we first meet Macbeth, however, we find him torn between loyalty and ambition. After the witches deliver his prophecy to him, he decides, "If Chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me, / Without my stir" (1.3.144-45). Yet he wants to talk privately with Banquo at their earliest convenience regarding the witches' prophecies. Macbeth has no reason to believe that the prophecies are wrong at this point, however. If he were truly satisfied to allow Chance to work out his fate, his response to Duncan's proclamation of Malcolm's succession to his throne would not elicit the response it does, namely Macbeth's frustration, revealed in his aside:

The Prince of Cumberland!--That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires!
Let not light see my black and deep desires;
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (1.4.48-53)

Macbeth acknowledges his ambition, but he squelches that awareness. He does not want to think about his lust for the throne. He wants to separate his reason from his passion. On the other hand, perhaps Macbeth immediately conceives plans to kill Duncan at Inverness that night, and these plans are the stars to which he is alluding. And perhaps his statement "let that be" directly suggests the murder of Duncan. Yet, either way, it seems that at this point Macbeth is ambivalent.

Macbeth's first major soliloquy demonstrates this ambivalence. He wants to believe that the murder of Duncan "Might be the be-all and the end-all," but he knows that "bloody instructions . . . return / To plague th' inventor" (1.7.5, 9-10). He recognizes that only his ambition, his lust for power, is driving him to murder his king, and perhaps this is insufficient motivation. Indeed, immediately after his soliloquy he tells his wife that they will "proceed no further in this

business" and that he wants to bask in the "golden opinions" he has so newly won (1.7.31, 33). He vacillates between loyalty and betrayal, and Lady Macbeth gives him exactly what he needs at this point--the plan to frame the chamberlains for Duncan's murder. Lady Macbeth allows Macbeth to cut through his own ambivalence. She offers the rational will that completes his own passion. Though Lady Macbeth lusts after power just as much as, if not more than, her husband, she is able to control her passions with her domineering intellect. In some respects, she lives out the Elizabethan ethos of rational control over passionate nature. Of course, like Edmund and Iago, her intellect is poisoned. She is inherently evil, and though she has a prurient need for power, most explicitly recognizable in her capacity to reason. As the play progresses, and Macbeth spirals further and further down into non-being, moving further from rational thought, Lady Macbeth slips further away from the center of action. Her sleepwalking/insanity leading to suicide demonstrates the eventual poisoning of the rational will by ruthless action guided by base ambition, demonstrating that her "rationality" was fallacious to begin with. The head is cut off, and the powerful irony is that her reason initiated Macbeth's ruthlessness and that that in turn led to her demise.

Though Macbeth is "settled" on the plan (1.7.80), his reason is infected. In his second soliloquy he sees a dagger floating before him, leading him to Duncan's chamber. And though many readers may find Macbeth's fear or guilt rising to the surface here, there is no direct reference to fear on his part. In fact he tries to clutch the dagger, then follows it. Though he recognizes that it might be proceeding from his own "heat-oppressed brain," he continues moving toward Duncan's chamber. In spite of his questionable frame of mind, Macbeth

insists on proceeding. We have to assume that as a warrior, Macbeth is no stranger to fear, but understands that dwelling upon one's fears is unhealthy for the soldier, possibly paralyzing the will and as a result taking the "horror from the time" (2.1.59). Before the murder, Macbeth is a man who distrusts words, which are reflections of thought: "Whiles I threat, he lives: / Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives" (2.1.60-61).

Yet, immediately following the murder, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth change roles. Macbeth is haunted by the chamberlains and the "Amen" stuck in his throat, as well as by the witches' prophecies. Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth to stop thinking about these things. She says, "Consider it not so deeply" (2.2.29), and "These deeds must not be thought / After these ways" (32-33), and "You do unbend your noble strength, to think / So brainsickly of things" (44-45). But from this point on, Macbeth will assume he has the whole picture and will act accordingly. After the chaos of the discovery of Duncan's body, Macbeth arranges to have Banquo killed, no doubt recalling Banquo's statement of loyalty in Act 2:

MACBETH. If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,
It shall make honour for you.
BANQUO. So I lose none
In seeking to augment it, but still keep
My bosom franchis'd, and allegiance clear. . . (2.1.25-29)

Macbeth's perspicacity is accurate in this regard. His suspicions of Banquo's insight into his own character are warranted, as evidenced in Banquo's minor soliloquy at the opening of Act 3:

Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the Weird Women promis'd; and, I fear,
Thou play'dst most foully for't . . . (3.1.1-3)

But it is unclear whether or not Banquo is a direct danger to Macbeth, but he does not consider this. Upon acquiring the throne, he immediately plans to have Banquo killed. Macbeth reveals his fears of Banquo in his third major soliloquy. He believes that in Banquo's nature there "Reigns that which would be fear'd," namely his daring and, ironically enough, the "dauntless temper of his mind" that "hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour / To act in safety" (3.1.50, 51, 52-53). It is fascinating to note that what Macbeth fears most in Banquo are his rational strengths. What makes Banquo's rationality different from Lady Macbeth's is that Banquo's mentality stems from loyalty to the king, whereas Lady Macbeth's grows from her own and her husband's ambition. But more importantly, Banquo's clarity of thought is in direct contradiction to Macbeth's own shortsightedness. Although he claims in the soliloquy that he fears no one other than Banquo, we know that Banquo is only one of many things he has to fear.

In Macbeth's third major soliloquy we have our clearest glimpse into his conscious wrestling with non-being. What concerns Macbeth most is not any explicit danger that Banquo poses to him but rather the assumption that he will not have an heir to inherit the throne, for the witches prophesied that Banquo's progeny will be kings. Macbeth rails at this:

They hail'd him father to a line of kings:
 Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,
 And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
 Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
 No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
 For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
 For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
 Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,
 Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
 Given to the common Enemy of man,
 To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! (3.1.59-69)

Macbeth is not concerned with his own safety but rather is distressed by the temporary nature of his reign, not to be able to pass the throne down to a son. To leave the throne to an heir is to ensure some small measure of immortality, to live beyond the grave. Macbeth wants to be the Aristotelian first unmoved mover in a line of royalty, affecting events yet not being affected by them. His ambition is not only to reign as king but to conquer death, though the prophecies predict otherwise. Macbeth recognizes the sterile quality of his existence, illustrated by the masturbatory imagery in lines 61-63 (These feelings of impotence will blossom most fully in his "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow" soliloquy in Act 5, scene 5). At the conclusion of the soliloquy, Macbeth makes his most sweeping statement concerning his quest to apotheosize himself: "Rather than [succumb to the forces of negation], come, fate, into the list, / And champion me to th' utterance!" (3.1.70-71). Macbeth is "challenging Fate to the combat" (Muir, note 75) in order to defeat it. This is his most conspicuously tragic statement, for it explicitly--and ironically--reflects his belief in non-contingency. It is significant that this comment reflecting most accurately and explicitly his belief in non-contingency comes at the moment when he most clearly contemplates his own negation. But it is also crucial to note that Macbeth has already initiated a line of action *prior* to this reflection. He has spoken with the murderers at least once before they arrive on-stage immediately following his soliloquy ("Was it not yesterday we spoke together?" (3.1.73)). Regardless of the apparently thoughtful nature of the speech, Shakespeare presents a man who acts before he thinks, impulsively driven to do anything to ward off his own negation by negating others. Also, Shakespeare's point appears to be that killing off other people is an

oversimplification of negation. It is an attempt on the part of the individual to externalize the forces of non-being. In Macbeth's fear of Banquo we perceive his real underlying fear, his fear of non-being.

The realm of thought for Macbeth has become a dangerous one, poisoned and infected by his past actions and perceived future threats. In Act 3, scene 2, he exclaims, "O! full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife! / Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives" (36-37). Macbeth's mind is not possessed by any guilt for his deed, as is sometimes thought, but is rather poisoned by the fact that Banquo still lives, as does his son, possibly the first in the line of kings prophesied by the witches. It is significant that Macbeth states immediately after, "There's comfort yet; they are assailable" (39). Macbeth finds comfort in acting to eliminate the forces posed against him. Rather than dealing with the scorpions of his own diseased intellect, Macbeth tries to act on the external world in ways that will eradicate the disruptive elements of his own psyche. He confronts the contrary forces of the universe by acting rather than thinking about the implications of his actions.

Whenever Macbeth is most plagued psychologically, he creates some external agent to vilify. Faulkner will replicate this quality in the character of Jason Compson who also identifies external agents to suffer the rage of his own feelings of powerlessness stemming from his own particular confrontation with negation. H.W. Fawkner suggests, "In each phase of anguished servitude, [Macbeth] focuses on a particular obstacle, feeling that only this hindrance spoils [his own perception of] truth" (113). Following the appearance of Banquo's ghost in the banquet scene, where Macbeth can be seen reeling around the stage, Macbeth shifts his focus to Macduff. When his wits are called

most into question, Macbeth looks for an external enemy. Not feeling guilty but rather worrying about getting caught, Macbeth states, "It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood" (3.4.121). Immediately after, Macbeth, to our surprise, asks, "How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person, / At our great bidding?" (127-28). Macbeth begins musing on the "bloody instructions" that have obviously returned to "plague th'inventor," but rather than follow this rational line of thought, he shifts his focus toward an agent upon which he can act. He resolves to return to the witches, an external source of knowledge (another action). And indeed he states that "Strange things I have in head, that will to hand, / Which must be acted, ere they may be scann'd" (138-39). He decides that he must act before he thinks, before he scans his own thoughts. For Macbeth, thinking has become a contradiction to his own omnipotence, a reminder of contingency. He wants to speak to the witches so that they can provide the certainty he cannot provide for himself. Like Oedipus, Macbeth must know his fate: "[F]or now I am bent to know, / By the worst means, the worst" (3.4. 134-35).

But it is significant that, unlike Oedipus, Macbeth receives contradictory and obfuscating information in the three apparitions, and, rather than consider any possible negative interpretations of the surreptitious conjurations, he chooses to believe in the permanence overtly implied within the prophecies. When Lennox reports that Macduff "is fled to England," Macbeth responds in an aside,

The flighty purpose is never o'ertook,
 Unless the deed go with it. From this moment,
 The very firstlings of my heart shall be
 The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
 To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done.
(4.1.145-49)

In these lines, Macbeth is really attempting to dissociate himself from thinking. He states that "firstlings" of his "heart," or first impulses of his passion, will lead to the first actions of his hands. He does not state that the first thoughts of his mind will lead to action, but rather his actions will stem from his heart, the seat of passion, not reason. Macbeth has these two embattled regions of human consciousness, passion and reason, hopelessly confused. As a result of this confusion, he resolves to surprise Macduff's castle and kill "His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls / That trace him in his line" (4.2.150-52). Not only is this a foolish choice (Why give your enemy even more reason to seek your destruction?), but it again reveals Macbeth's obsession with royal lineage. When we look at his decision from this perspective, it becomes clear how obsessed he is with the nullification of his own line on the throne, the extermination of his own immortality. He has taken the prophecies originally ascribed to Banquo and applied them to Macduff as well. All Macbeth's enemies must, for him, pose a threat to his lineage, or at least possess a fecundity that he himself lacks, the threat that consistently motivates him to act after his initial murder of Duncan.

In this light, Macbeth's famous soliloquy (5.5.19-28) on the meaninglessness of life takes on special significance. For Macbeth, life has become a "walking shadow" subservient to the immortality he so desperately desires. After his wife's death, Macbeth does not want to accept that his tale will be "heard no more." This defiance infuses his tragedy with heroism. Clinging to the prophecies, he carries on believing that he can vanquish fate, and as one by one the prophecies prove true and simultaneously push him towards his destruction, he refuses to relent, even after realizing the "truth" of the

prophecies. He declares at his moment of *anagnorisis*, "And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd / That palter us in a double sense; / That keep the word of promise to our ear, / And break it to our hope" (5.8.18-21). He initially says that he will not fight with Macduff, but soon states that he "will not yield, / To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet" (27-28). Macbeth is slain by Macduff, and his head is stuck upon a pike, suitably demonstrating Macbeth's disconnection between head and body, reason and passion, the glory that resists contingency and the mortality that cannot avoid it. In addition, the beheading simultaneously and ironically echoes Macbeth's initial grandeur reported in Act 1 and his murder of Duncan in Act 2.

In Macbeth's quest for immortality, the vanquishment over non-being, Macbeth fostered and acted from a belief in his own non-contingency, even when it became necessary to divorce himself from rational thought to maintain that belief. Jason Compson and Thomas Sutpen reflect these qualities most explicitly. Both demonstrate an obsession with action and control in an environment that seems always to be one step ahead of them. And both believe that purely external events are responsible for their conflicts; they concentrate all of their energy on controlling or eradicating these negating forces, often at the cost of rational thought.

Hamlet clings to rational thought to the end, completely reversing the paradigm we see in Macbeth. Hamlet plagues himself with rationalizations. He insists throughout the play that he figure things out. This insistence stems from his own belief that he *should be able* to figure things out. He believes that he should be able to come to conclusions and act free of the constraining forces around him. Non-being, negation, and death, however, are the elements that

keep Hamlet from reaching "solid" conclusions upon which to act. His conflict with non-being is ineluctably involved with his belief that he can and should be able to control surrounding events. This conflict is at the heart of K. R. Eissler's view of the tragedy:

What the tragedy of Hamlet, however, means to me is that even if man strives to live up to his potentiality, strives to bring to full fruition the seed that the Divinity, as we are told, has put in him, he is still bound to live a dangerous life, filled with conflict and suffering and with a great chance of meeting with catastrophe.
(348)

Despite the fact that Hamlet wants to act in ways that will fulfill his duty, he is confronted with internal and external forces that prevent him from achieving his desired ends.

When we are first introduced to Hamlet, we understand his traditional role as the melancholic. He wears the "trappings and the suits of woe," but we will discover that he is much more than this. Shakespeare explodes the traditional role as he fleshes out a figure in the throes of grief, not only over his father's death and mother's marriage but at the universe itself--the "unweeded garden" gone to seed that is suggested in the opening scene of the play as guards watch over a state preparing for war. We see in Hamlet's first major soliloquy in Act 1, scene 2, a mind at war with itself. The two ends of the Great Chain of Being are juxtaposed, literally and syntactically. Literally, he compares his father to Hyperion and his uncle to a satyr. Syntactically, he juxtaposes these ideas, as well. His musings on the worthlessness of the world are often preceded with an epithet such as "O God! God!". Later he says, "O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourn'd longer" (1.2.150-51). Both literally and syntactically God is in conflict with the beast in man, or in this case, woman. Hamlet states that Claudius is no more like his father than he is

like Hercules. He sees a world where the natural order has been "sullied," believing that the world, like himself, has been overrun with "the rank and gross in nature." Yet, like the melancholic, he believes, initially, that he can do nothing because he is all too aware of his own contingency, his enmeshment in the political net of Denmark's monarchy.

It is not until he discovers his father's "foul and most unnatural murder" in Act 1, scene 5, that he begins to evolve into quite possibly the greatest of all tragic figures. When his father's spirit tells him about Claudius, Hamlet initially responds with alacrity, crying, "Haste me to know't, that I with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love / May sweep to my revenge" (1.5.29-31). At this point, Hamlet shows no separation between thought and feeling, or more ideally, between thought and action. He is almost joyful--indeed he seems elated when Horatio and the others catch up with him. It is as if he finally has a fully justifiable reason to act within the poisoned world he inhabits. Hamlet's first decision is to feign madness, and this role he writes for himself will pervade the rest of the play. He will be locked in an internal and external struggle for true identity, wavering between what he believes his role should be and how he "actually" acts. His psyche will become the battleground where we will see again and again Hamlet's belief in non-contingency wrestling with and against the forces of non-being. In this respect, he may appear to be similar to Macbeth, but whereas Macbeth's conflict focused more sharply upon reaching desired outcomes regardless of philosophical or moral justifications, Hamlet's conflict is much more cerebral, concentrated more upon philosophical rationales for action.

Nowhere is Hamlet's struggle more glaringly displayed than in his second major soliloquy, where he expresses his reactions to the First Player's speech. He rails against his own perceived indolence, disgusted that the player "in a fiction, in a dream of passion," could make it appear that he is distraught with grief at the story of Pyrrhus and Hecuba, while he, who is truly distraught, who truly does have "the motive and the cue for passion," does nothing. He concludes, "[F]or it cannot be / But I am pigeon-liver'd and lack gall / To make oppression bitter" (2.2.571-73). Regardless of what we may think, Hamlet believes that he should have done something by now. After cursing himself, he states, "About, my brains" (584), as if commanding his consciousness like an army to turn in the opposite direction towards productive thought. He now expresses his plan for the play by which he will test the veracity of the ghost's testimony. Despite his uncertainty, though, he does accuse himself for not having taken revenge. The soliloquy is as much comprised of Hamlet's self-deprecation as it is of "the plan." In fact, we know that he has already conceived the idea for the play before the soliloquy begins, for he has spoken earlier with the First Player about "a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines" that he "would set down and insert" into "The Murder of Gonzago" (2.2.535-36). In the soliloquy Shakespeare is not only trying to show us Hamlet's plan firsthand but he is demonstrating the extremely conflicted nature of his consciousness. He wants to act, but he also wants to know what he is doing. He does not want to act blindly. He wants to believe that he can find a path through the overgrown and untended wilderness of the world that will allow him to successfully revenge himself upon his uncle and survive that revenge himself. Though he never states the desire for his own survival explicitly, implicitly it lies behind his

vacillation. If he were unconcerned about his own survival, he could easily kill the king at any time. Hamlet's central concern here is that he believes he should be able to concoct a plan that will give him certainty about Claudius, in turn justifying his own course of action, and possibly initiating it.

The final lines of the soliloquy suggest Hamlet's motivation: "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King" (600-01). Hamlet wants not only to stir up Claudius's conscience, his internal moral compass, but he wants to catch Claudius's awareness or the "fact or faculty of knowing and understanding," another contemporary meaning for "conscience" in Elizabethan England (Jenkins, note 280). On a more unconscious level, Hamlet wants Claudius to know that he knows about the murder. This would initiate action on the King's part, allowing himself to delay, without his need to resolve to take any more actions. The subconscious psychology is very complex here: He could act out his revenge by reacting to Claudius's attack upon him, claiming self-defense. He could act and not act simultaneously, a viable, though improbable solution to the no-win situation within which he finds himself.

Consciously, however, Hamlet is obsessed with action. He is similar to Macbeth in this respect, but his more introspective nature leads him to very different conclusions. He believes that he should be able to affect events in order to turn them to his favor, and that if only he were not so afraid of dying he would be able to do so. The third major soliloquy, at the opening of Act 3, reveals and explores this conflict. Hamlet begins the soliloquy with the question of being versus negation. He identifies two choices regarding the nobility of existence: 1) "in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," or 2) "to take arms against a sea of troubles" (3.1.57-58, 59). Hamlet

basically posits the source of existential angst. He debates whether one should suffer internally all of fortune's "buffets and rewards," or whether one should confront fate and through that confrontation die. This death is not suicide specifically, though it certainly has elements of self-destruction to it. In the first option, Hamlet reflects on the mass of men who "lead lives of quiet desperation." We might initially believe that he is referring to qualities of stoic fortitude, but in light of his own self-execration and his praise of Fortinbras's resolve later in the play, we understand that Hamlet is no stoic. The second option, "Taking arms against a sea of troubles," is that of the tragic protagonist who takes on all of the forces of fate and the universe in an attempt to vanquish them. Hamlet understands and expresses the essential quality of the tragic figure--one who confronts fate and negation and is destroyed in this confrontation. Throughout the soliloquy, however, he is speaking generally--the singular personal pronoun is absent throughout the speech. From his own experiential view of the world, Hamlet considers the universal human condition, namely that we must wrestle with the decision of how to be in a world that is driven by negation.

Initially, Hamlet muses on the peacefulness of death. He ponders why one would suffer the myriad injustices of life "When he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin" (75-76). *Quietus*, legally speaking, is the payment of a debt (Jenkins, note 75), suggesting that Hamlet has the revenge against Claudius, Hamlet's debt to his dead father, at the center of his thoughts. In this case, the dagger would not be pointed suicidally at himself, but at Claudius, and this action would lead to his own inevitable destruction. He is torn because he believes he must act but cannot find a way to act that will prevent his own

annihilation. He does not want to die. As stated above, if he were truly suicidal he could merely walk up to Claudius and kill him, letting his fate befall him in the process, but he still hopes he can find a way to avoid death.

The third soliloquy continues by proving that Hamlet wants to live. He posits that because we do not know what comes after death we prevent ourselves from taking actions that might lead to death. We would rather "bear those ills we have / Than fly to others we know not of" (81-82). This awareness ("conscience") makes us cowards, and anything we might resolve to do is corrupted and subverted by this thought. We fail to act because we fear that our actions might bring about our destruction. For Hamlet, this is especially the case. It is negation that keeps him from acting, literally keeping him in the realm of thought. At least for now, he chooses "to be," mentally suffering "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," waiting in isolation.

We cannot help but feel that Hamlet gets more than he bargained for, however, when Ophelia approaches and returns his gifts. Despite his own resolutions not yet to act upon the world, the world continues to act upon him. Ophelia's rejection of him at the behest of Polonius is the last stripping away of those who are closest to him. The first two acts of the play serve to isolate Hamlet. With the exception of Horatio, there is no one to whom he can turn. First his mother, then his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and finally the woman he loves, Ophelia, are pulled away from him. Upon her rejection of him, Hamlet responds realistically--with anger. He scornfully questions Ophelia's honesty in relation to her beauty. But it is essential to realize that initially Hamlet scorns himself much more than Ophelia. He says, "I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my

mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in" (3.1.121-27). He is still consumed with his own situation. His focus, though ironic and obfuscated, is completely internal.

Hamlet continues by asking Ophelia where her father is, and after her obviously lame reply that he is at home, Hamlet concludes that she is lying to him and that most probably they are being watched. Hamlet's shift of focus is so violent that there must be some impetus for it. His anger is now thrown explicitly upon Ophelia, and indirectly upon Polonius and Claudius. This can be justified in no other way than that he has made some conclusions about the situation. He knows now, completely, that Ophelia has betrayed him, not just by returning his gifts, but by taking part in Polonius's plans, and he casts down upon her all the rage and contempt he feels towards his mother, Claudius, Polonius, and the rest of the uncomprehending and abnegating world. On a deeper level, though, he is distraught over his inability to control events. He is enraged because he cannot retreat from the world. He has nowhere to run. The negative forces of his universe, personified in the rejection of Ophelia and the machinations of Claudius and Polonius, have sought him out, and, when Hamlet finds that he is powerless to act directly upon the powerful forces of Polonius and Claudius, he attacks Ophelia.

In spite of this quandary, the play within the play demonstrates conclusively Claudius's guilt in his brother's murder, and Hamlet once again seems set on revenge. When he comes upon Claudius "praying," he initially draws his sword, but then he begins to think about his actions. Unlike Macbeth at his own moment of supposed clarity, when he states "Strange things I have in

head, that will to hand, / Which must be acted, ere they may be scann'd" (3.4.138-39), Hamlet declares about his "revenge," "That would be scann'd" (3.3.75). Unlike Macbeth, Hamlet concludes that he must stop and think before he acts. He decides, quite logically, that he cannot kill Claudius at his prayers, sending him to heaven. But the closet scene with his mother reveals that he still feels he should be acting. He does act spontaneously in the murder of Polonius, but the result of his impulsive action is that he has killed the wrong man. When he acts without thinking or without knowing his course, Hamlet further complicates his situation. When the ghost arrives, Hamlet asks it, "Do you not come your tardy son to chide, / That, laps'd in time and passion, lets go by / Th'important acting of your dread command?" (3.4.107-09). In essence, Hamlet has let three acts go by without fulfilling his duty to his murdered father. Arguably, he has been about the business of clarifying the veracity of the ghost's testimony, but we cannot forget the fact that Hamlet thinks he should have everything under control.

In his fourth and final major soliloquy, upon his departure for England, we find Hamlet's most scathing attacks upon himself for his impotence. Hamlet execrates himself, and implies that he has merely slept and fed when he should have been avenging his father's murder. He states that the ability to reason, granted by God, should be used, but he finds his own thoughts to be "one part wisdom / And ever three parts coward" (4.4.42-43). He believes that he has "cause, and will, and strength, and means" to take his revenge, but he has accomplished nothing (45). He sees in Fortinbras a "delicate and tender prince" who dares to challenge his own fate "exposing what is mortal and unsure / To all that fortune, death, and danger dare" (48, 51-52). Hamlet

believes that Fortinbras has taken arms against a sea of troubles (indeed "Fortinbras" is French for "strong-in-arm" (Jenkins, note 163)), and he has confronted danger because of honor: "Rightly to be great / Is not to stir without great argument, / But greatly to find quarrel in a straw / When honor's at the stake" (53-56). But Hamlet subverts his own rising ire. After scorning himself again for doing nothing, he states valiantly, "O, from this time forth / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth" (65-66). Why does not Hamlet say "My acts be bloody?" He has stated immediately above that his thoughts are three-quarters coward. And he has declared in his previous soliloquy that "the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought / And enterprises of great pitch and moment / With this regard their currents turn awry / And lose the name of action" (3.1.84-88). So why should things be different now? In fact, Hamlet's declaration of bloody thoughts is completely ironic--he's leaving the very person upon whom he needs to take revenge.

So what are we to make of Hamlet? He is a man trapped in a situation not of his own making who believes that he can and should take action to eradicate the evil done his father. Yet he is desperately trying not to die in the process. We feel sympathy for his struggle and admire him for his refusal to succumb to circumstance, though he is staring negation in the face at every turn. Unlike Macbeth, who refuses to stop and think, Hamlet cannot stop thinking. The possibility of death is too much for him. It colors all of his thoughts, though he often cannot bring himself to mention it. Yet it is not so much that Hamlet is a coward but that he is desperately trying to find a solution to his problem that will allow him to destroy Claudius and also allow him to cheat death. The enormous frustration that Hamlet feels stems from the fact that

he cannot exist free of the abnegating forces surrounding him, nor can he come up with a solution to defeat them. This is the primary factor that makes Hamlet both tragic and heroic. His plight represents the tragic sense of life, the human condition within which we struggle to determine our own identities and places in a chaotic and entropic universe.

Hamlet's tragic *anagnorisis* comes in the graveyard scene in Act 5, scene

1. K. R. Eissler writes,

The episode has a three-layered structure: the exchange between the two gravediggers; Hamlet's discourse with Horatio; and Ophelia's funeral. In these three successive contexts, three quite different worlds are introduced: the realistic or naturalistic approach to death; the metaphysical view of death; and the shattering actuality of death's presence. (402)

Eissler's argument can be extended further. The heart of Hamlet's recognition that he cannot conquer negation occurs in this scene. It is fundamentally central to Hamlet's final resolutions in the last scene of the play. Throughout the graveyard scene, Hamlet slowly approaches death philosophically, musing on its universality with Horatio until it invades his own philosophical and existential considerations in the most jarring and powerful manner with the funeral of his beloved Ophelia. Despite whatever or however Hamlet *thinks* about death philosophically at a distance, it invades his consciousness anyway with much more personal and emotional force than his philosophical musings prepare him for. He cannot control negation; he cannot keep negation away. Hamlet has spent the entire play wrestling with non-being, trying to control it and shape it to his own ends, or at least struggling with how "to be" in the face of negation. But now, with the burial of Ophelia, Hamlet realizes that the battle is lost, that death wins, despite our efforts, either mental and physical. With this realization Hamlet steps forward and announces himself as if he were king: "This is I, /

Hamlet the Dane" (Jenkins, note 251; 5.1.250-51). And, as the first quarto stage direction ("Hamlet leaps in after Laertes") and the "Elegy on Burbage" ("Oft have I seen him leap into the grave") suggest (Jenkins, note 252), Hamlet embraces his fate and demonstrates his newly acquired understanding by literally and symbolically leaping into death, into the sea of troubles.

In the opening moments of the last scene of the play, Hamlet expresses his new awareness. He seems more calm, less frenetic in his attitudes declaring, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (5.2.10-11). He exudes a different attitude toward the Fortune he earlier referred to as "a Strumpet" (2.2.236). Regarding "conscience," he says that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's fates are not "near [his] conscience" (5.2.58), and when he says to Horatio, "Is't not perfect conscience / To quit [Claudius] with this arm?" (67-68), we recall his previous thoughts concerning conscience, but they resonate differently now. Hamlet's mind is more calm, his demeanor less tortured. Horatio tells him that the King will soon learn about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths, to which Hamlet replies, "The interim is mine" (73). He has lost everything, most explicitly his need for absolute proofs and assurances that he know everything. He has resolved to take his revenge upon Claudius regardless of what will happen to him.

Hamlet's resolve is further evidenced by the last private dialogue between him and Horatio before the fencing match:

HORATIO. If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall
their repair hither and say you are not fit.
HAMLET. Not a whit. We defy augury. There is special
providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to
come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it
will come. The readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he
leaves, knows aught, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.
(5.2.213-20)

Hamlet has chosen to abandon his obfuscating will to know. In Horatio's words, he chooses to disobey his mind, understanding now that death will come when it will come. He concludes that leaving life early is not such a bad thing because no one knows what he is leaving behind anyway. He understands the impossibility of escaping negation, but rather than succumbing to quietism or despair, he chooses literally and symbolically to "take arms against a sea of troubles," in this case, a sword against Laertes and the King. Walter King suggests that at the end of the play, Hamlet can "freely adopt an affirmative attitude that gives meaning to his life" (164). But this meaning is infused with the acceptance of death. Hamlet's decision and actions at the end of the play substantiate his earlier musings regarding the destruction of one who chooses "to take arms against a sea of troubles / And by opposing end them," and it is poignant how quickly Hamlet is snuffed out once he takes action against the forces of non-being.

Hamlet and Macbeth serve as opposite ends upon a tragic continuum. One can place any of Shakespeare's tragic protagonists somewhere along this continuum of thought and action. Using this continuum, one understands that at the core of Shakespeare's tragic musings lies the conflict between what we think and how we act, and how these responses are related. The struggle for non-contingency is our attempt to control a world so often defined by chaos or evil, a universe that seems most typical when it is negating our attempts to determine our own true, individual identities. In the end, it is not their heroism, their difference from us that draws us to them, but rather the fact that Macbeth, Hamlet, and Shakespeare's other tragic figures display those elements that are

most like us--their resistance to negation in the attempt to define their own individual identities. Robert B. Heilman examines this idea in his discussion of Macbeth: "As with all his tragic heroes, Shakespeare explores the point of view of self, the self-defending and self-justifying motions of mind and heart" (138). Macbeth and Hamlet demonstrate the self attempting to justify itself in the limiting world where negation and non-being pervade all of our attempts to control our destinies.

Faulkner absorbed the parameters of the tragic struggle presented by Shakespeare. We recognize the pervasion of these ideas in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, where Faulkner puts forth the idea of "one puny inexhaustible voice" talking at the "last ding-dong of doom," while reminding us that the only good stories are ones concerning "the problems of the heart in conflict with itself" ("Nobel Prize" 1124). Again and again the Shakespearean tragic prototypes will appear throughout Faulkner's work. Jason Compson and Thomas Sutpen reverberate with tones of Macbeth's desperate struggle for supremacy and omnipotence. Quentin Compson and, to varying degrees, the Sutpen children resemble Hamlet's quest to fend off negation in an inherited and cursed world.

Chapter Two: Quentin Compson's "Illusion of Philosophers and Fools" in
The Sound and the Fury

Though it might be possible to view all of the Compson family through a tragic lens, Quentin and Jason are the most clearly tragic. Though Caddy endeavors to control her own fate in opposition to outworn social codes, and though Faulkner himself referred to her as "a tragic little girl" (Introduction 228), Caddy's function in the novel is only significant insofar as she exists in her brothers' psyches. Whether we agree or disagree with Faulkner's choice to restrict Caddy from having her own voice, we must agree that any view we get of Caddy is filtered through her brothers' consciousnesses and our own amalgamation of their wildly divergent views of her. Faulkner creates filters through which we view Caddy, and through the filters of Quentin's and Jason's consciousnesses, we see the influence of Shakespeare upon Faulkner's tragic paradigm. Though set in the Modernist cultural and spiritual morass of the post-Civil War American South, Faulkner's tragic figures reflect the same crises of consciousness faced by Shakespeare's tragic heroes. When we analyze the brothers, and their perceptions of Caddy specifically, we find that Quentin and Jason resonate most explicitly and harmoniously with Shakespeare's tragic creations, Hamlet and Macbeth, respectively.

Faulkner is rarely concerned with formulaic constructions of plot or character in any Aristotelian sense, but throughout his work he does take from Shakespeare a fundamental conception of tragedy based on the two intimately related qualities discussed earlier--the tragic protagonist's conflict with negation or non-being coupled with his belief in non-contingency, or the illusion that he should be able to act in a manner that is both separate from and in control of the

environment in which he finds himself. It is from this illusion of non-contingency that the tragic figure believes he can conquer negation, apotheosizing himself in the phenomenal world. These fundamental qualities are central to Hamlet and Macbeth and are intrinsic to all Faulkner's tragic heroes, especially those in The Sound and the Fury. With the possible exception of Absalom, Absalom!, in no other book does Faulkner draw such close parallels with Shakespearean tragedy. Not only does he take his title from Macbeth's despairing soliloquy on the meaninglessness of life, but also Quentin contemplates his existence from a perspective of Hamlet-like introspection, while desperately trying to avoid any analysis of his own past. While Jason furiously scours the stage of Jefferson, Quentin, like Hamlet, exists in an interior world cluttered with ghosts from an antebellum Southern aristocracy that has been replaced by modern ambivalence.

In his discussion of the differences between Benjy and Quentin, Joseph Blotner points out, "In contrast to the mind of the idiot, that of his psychotic older brother was filled with allusions to the Bible, to Shakespeare, and to numerous other works of literature" (213). Because Faulkner believed in the power of the "lumber room" of the writer's unconscious memory (Gwynn and Blotner 72), we can enter Quentin's mind through an analysis of the Shakespearean materials upon which he drew. His mother and Phil Stone exposed Faulkner to Shakespeare throughout his youth and his early reading (Blotner 16, 50; Karl 71), and we can conclude that Shakespeare's tragic vision entered his consciousness at an early age. In The Sound and the Fury, we perceive most keenly Faulkner's indebtedness to Shakespeare in the character of Quentin Compson.

The similarities between Quentin Compson of The Sound and the Fury and Shakespeare's Hamlet are striking. Central to Quentin's character is the confrontation with non-being, and though he plans his own suicide throughout the day, he longs for permanence, a Hamlet-like security where he will no longer be assaulted with the impotence central to his feelings about his own past. As we have seen, Hamlet finds himself in an environment not of his own creation where he must act in accordance with prescribed codes of honor that might lead to his destruction. Quentin's actions closely parallel Hamlet's. Both contemplate their own actions meticulously, some argue too meticulously. Both Hamlet's and Quentin's minds are attuned to philosophical complexities, and both are "keenly and poetically aware of man's fallen condition" (Bevington, Hamlet 1069). Both deal with the utterly despairing qualities of futile action in a meaningless world. Harold Jenkins believes that Hamlet's task of revenge is intimately related to the universal mysteries of man's being which occupy his mind (127), and we find the same crises in Quentin's situation involving Dalton Ames. Hamlet contemplates being and nothingness throughout the play, and this existential angst colors all his reflections on himself and his situation; he repeatedly chastises himself for not acting, for not moving swiftly and resolutely to his revenge. Quentin does the same. Underlying Hamlet's and Quentin's conflicts with non-being is each character's belief that he should be able to control events in the world and that, in so doing, he could ward off his own destruction. What makes each so fascinating, though, is not the quality of their actions but the complexity of their thought.

Two crucial elements of Quentin's tragedy are intimately entangled. Briefly, the first aspect of Quentin's neurosis revolves around his quest for

control (most specifically over Caddy) to defend the Compson honor, emblematic of Southern ideology. Upon his failure to fulfill the requirements of honor and upon the recognition of his own impotence, Quentin is, in essence, banished. Mr. Compson tells Quentin that he needs to go to Harvard, where he desperately struggles to separate himself from his excruciatingly painful past, the second aspect of Quentin's tragedy. His quest is to escape from the Furies of his past that pursue him doggedly around Cambridge on June 2, 1910. Quentin's struggle strikingly mirrors Hamlet's. Quentin wrestles with crises that revolve most specifically around honor and action, neither of which Quentin can resolve, while engaging in an almost completely cerebral, philosophical argument about existence, being and nothingness, obsessed with the futility of any earthly endeavor, and desperately, though futilely, battling to keep the past at bay, outside of his consciousness.

Both Hamlet and Quentin contemplate their actions, past and present, quite meticulously. In order to understand the depths of Quentin Compson, we must begin in the narrative present. In this narrative present we are slowly exposed to the ironic impotence central to Quentin's past, and we see that Quentin's failures in the past initiate his present crisis, exemplifying Faulkner's enduring commentary on the past's intrusion upon the present. Quentin's monologue begins *in medias res* of the narrative present of June 2, 1910, in the midst of his determined struggle to keep the past at bay. In his brilliant essay on language and the narrative construction of The Sound and the Fury, Noel Polk describes the over-arching conflict of Quentin's narrative:

The substance of his monologue is his effort to sort out, analyze, and come to terms with those scenes of pain that he can handle, and to evade, to repress, those he cannot. He is trying to shape his memory into an acceptable version of his life that will both

explain his present misery and justify his decision to commit suicide, and language is the only tool he has to effect the shape he wants. (150)

Quentin is operating in a narrative present where he attempts to avoid immersion in the past, yet he continues to succumb to it throughout his monologue. The past fights to break into his present despite his efforts to keep it out. We are reminded of Hamlet's third major soliloquy ("To be or not to be") where he tries to use language to come to terms with his own impotence as it functions in his choices concerning how "to be" in a world dominated by the tragic sense of life, while trying to argue from a generalized perspective without his own tortured "I" entering into the debate. Hamlet, while contemplating negation, tries to keep himself out of the equation. At the conclusion of Quentin's narrative, we will see his own diminution of the personal pronoun as well.

The first five paragraphs of Quentin's monologue introduce the various tragic elements Faulkner will explore throughout his section of the novel, concerning action, time, honor, and control, all in conflict with negation, absurdity, impotence, and futility. It may be helpful to think of these first five paragraphs of the monologue as the exposition of the thematic material that will be manipulated by the composer throughout a fugue. Faulkner will return again and again to this basic thematic material throughout Quentin's monologue, subtly developing and layering each theme until he builds the tragic tension between being and nothingness to its final crescendo and resolution in the last few pages. Though the thematic material builds throughout the monologue, ironically and tragically Quentin is steadily diminished to the point of

disappearance--the candle is snuffed out; Quentin is finally defeated by the forces of negation he believes he should be able to conquer.

The negating forces that Quentin will attempt to conquer throughout the day are introduced as Quentin awakes somewhere between seven and eight o'clock in the morning, ascertained by the "shadow of the sash" that appears on the curtains (76). Immediately Quentin encounters the shadow of time that he will attempt to trick or escape the rest of the day. He can hear his grandfather's watch, and he recalls his father's words concerning "the mausoleum of all hope and desire" that represents man's futile attempts to control time--explicitly the influences of fate in the phenomenal world. He recalls his father telling him, "I give [the watch] to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it" (76). Mr. Compson further demonstrates his nihilism in his speculations on any endeavor to fight for identity or meaning: "Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools" (76). The battle against time and the futility of action are themes with which Quentin will struggle, believing initially that he can conquer time in his very insistence that, through his actions, he can avoid it. Quentin elaborates upon these ideas by envisioning Christ walking "down the long and lonely light-rays," who, according to Mr. Compson, was not crucified, but rather "worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels" (76-77). In this first paragraph we are presented with the crucial conflicts of Quentin's narrative present. By June 2, 1910, Quentin has grown to believe that he has become a "walking shadow" whose actions in the phenomenal world signify nothing. Though we are not

aware of the extent of Quentin's psychological decay, we recognize that his father's nihilism is a theme to which Quentin will return throughout the day. Faulkner has introduced the symbols of the shadow and time which will resonate and metamorphose for Quentin all day.

Also throughout this introductory material, Faulkner demonstrates the parameters of Quentin's tragic situation, most explicitly the intrusion of Quentin's unchangeable and ignoble past upon the present. Quentin speculates on the unbroken "long diminishing parade of time," yet he has no control over where the parade is going other than suicide. His past is fixed and unchangeable, and he cannot separate this past from his present. Like Hamlet, Quentin is plagued by the notion of control versus impotence, and at the outset of his monologue, Quentin's struggle for control involves the repression of memories of his own humiliating past. By the end of this introductory portion of his narrative, however, we are presented with the first involuntary intrusion of the past into the present, which Faulkner represents in italic type: "The month of brides, the voice that breathed *She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent. Roses. Roses. Mr. and Mrs. Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of. Roses. Not virgins like dogwood, milkweed*" (77). Caddy has indirectly intruded upon Quentin's present. Faulkner's use of italics is especially important in conveying the involuntary nature of this intrusion. Quentin jerks himself away from the more painful past, represented in italic type, before he has to acknowledge Caddy directly--the sentence of the wedding invitation is cut off before Caddy's name can be mentioned.

Faulkner's syntactic representation of Quentin's various psychological states is crucial in understanding the parameters of Quentin's futile and tragic

attempts to avoid memories of his past. Noel Polk discusses the mechanical representation of Quentin's syntax, grammar, and punctuation. All of these

become objectively correlative to the state of Quentin's mind. The more in control he is, the more intricate and sophisticated the structure of his sentences, the cohesion of his paragraphs; the less lucid his mind, the less formal or "normal" the representation of his language on paper becomes. One can trace Quentin's psychic disintegration, his movements into and out of lucidity, in the degree of normality of his language's representation, from the intricately structured sentences of some passages, to the almost complete disintegration of traditional language representation in others . . . (150)

When Quentin loses the battle to control his own memories, Faulkner proportionately disrupts the grammatic and syntactic structure of the text, serving as a gauge to determine the success or failure of Quentin's attempt to evade his own memories. And, of course, it is significant that Faulkner abandons all syntactical normality by the conclusion of Quentin's section as Quentin descends closer and closer to suicide.

To summarize briefly, scarcely five paragraphs into Quentin's monologue, we are presented with the parameters of his tragic universe, the major subjective states with which he will wrestle throughout his day: the evasion of his own shadow, a meaningless conception of phenomenal existence that is directly descended from his father's fatalistic nihilism; his obsession with time and his evasion of all objectified time; and his desperate attempts in the narrative present to escape the intrusion of the past, more specifically those episodes concerning Caddy, honor, virginity, and sexuality.

Quentin avoids focusing upon his tragic past, and rather resolves to act in such ways to avoid the tragic implications of that past. Yet, like Hamlet, Quentin finds himself immersed in fatalistic internal conjecture where he contemplates his own weakness, where his failure to act in decisive and effective ways

intrudes constantly upon his consciousness--"all occasions do inform" against Quentin. He is constantly confronted with his inability to have shaped circumstances differently concerning Caddy, and like Hamlet, he sinks into self-loathing. Situations develop in the present that hauntingly shadow Quentin's initial failures in the South that cause him so much pain. But in Faulkner's unerring technique of building psychological suspense, he withholds the crucial episodes of Quentin's past until after he fleshes out two ironic ghosts in Quentin's narrative present, the lost Italian girl and Gerald Bland.

Reminiscent of Hamlet's observations on the First Player's speech about Pyrrhus's "aroused vengeance" and Fortinbras's forceful resolve to send 20,000 men to their deaths for an "eggshell" while he himself does nothing, all of Quentin's present interactions with people, most explicitly with the lost Italian girl and Gerald Bland, shadow his past impotence regarding Caddy and his own duty to protect her honor. The little Italian girl ironically characterizes the intrusion of Quentin's thoughts about his failures to protect and defend Caddy's honor, shattering his attempts to avoid any re-examination of this defeat in the narrative present, just as the First Player and Fortinbras show Hamlet his own failure to take revenge for his father's murder. Faulkner incorporates the little Italian girl brilliantly into the story. It is as if a dark personification of Caddy is stalking Quentin. The reader recalls the phrase "little sister death" that Quentin uses in the opening of his section. Just as he tries to "trick" and escape his shadow all day, he attempts to trick the little girl and run away from her. But pathetically, he is unable to escape, and later he is accused of molesting her by her older brother, who defends his sister just as Quentin thinks he should have defended Caddy. The little girl and her brother serve as shadows of a Caddy

and Quentin who never existed, while simultaneously indicting Quentin's past tragic failures. As Hamlet is confronted with the rage of Laertes defending his sister's death, Quentin confronts the rage of a brother defending his little sister from lecherous threats. It is as if fate has worked out present circumstances in order to torture Quentin. The concept of a brother defending and protecting his sister, acting in response to duty in the name of honor, is central to Hamlet and, as we see, to Quentin as well. Both Hamlet and Quentin are called by an amorphous "duty" to act in "honorable" ways within a corrupt and corrupting world, and both are indicted by examples of "nobility"--Hamlet by Fortinbras and Laertes, and Quentin by the Italian girl's brother.

In spite of all of his self-exculpatory remarks, Quentin, like Hamlet, cannot control even his own consciousness. The past intrudes, like Hamlet's father's ghost, into Quentin's present, controlling and shaping his fate, just as Hamlet's father's spirit returns to "whet" Hamlet's "almost blunted purpose" (3.4.111). After his Kafka-esque "trial," an absurd reflection of Quentin's ongoing self-judgment and condemnation, Quentin's case is dismissed, and he ends up at the picnic with Shreve, Spoade, Gerald Bland and Mrs. Bland. In an almost hypnotic stupor, Quentin associates Gerald Bland with Dalton Ames. At this point Quentin's past explodes violently and chaotically into his present. Spoade tells Quentin, "'The first I knew was when you jumped up all of a sudden and said, 'Did you ever have a sister? did you?' and when he said No, you hit him. I noticed you kept on looking at him, but you didn't seem to be paying any attention to what anybody was saying until you jumped up and asked him if he had any sisters" (166). When Quentin asked if he hurt Gerald, Shreve tells him, "You may have hit him. I may have looked away just then or

blinked or something. He boxed the hell out of you. He boxed you all over the place" (164). The feelings of self-loathing, anger, and impotence that Quentin experienced at home in Jefferson erupt into his present almost uncontrollably, and when Quentin is in his semi-conscious stupor after being "boxed" around by Gerald, he loses all capacity to prevent the past from invading his present consciousness. For all intents and purposes, Quentin has failed in his bid to escape his painful memories concerning Caddy.

Quentin's inability to escape the tormenting failures of his past is the most significant defeat of his tragedy. But what makes Quentin's failure more poignant is his resolution to kill himself before this particular example of his defeat, a clear illustration that Quentin has lived this defeat over and over again in his mind. Like an ironic and pathetic Prometheus, Quentin lives through his anguish and retribution incessantly. He is defeated not only once but perpetually. Like Hamlet, Quentin is unable to organize his thoughts or to function in the world in ways that keep his own defeat at bay. This quality reminds us of Hamlet who, in spite of all the events that flurry around him, is unable to control his own paralyzing intellect. Furthermore, like Hamlet, Quentin comes to muse most profoundly upon his own negation and impotence, the central aspect of his tragedy.

Throughout the day, and up until the picnic, Quentin has been able to keep, with varying degrees of success, two of the most painful episodes of this past from completely overtaking his conscious mind. These episodes represent most clearly the glaring failures from which Quentin has been trying to flee. As a result of his conflict with the little Italian girl and Gerald Bland, this past conquers his present completely, and we, as readers, are most privy to the

initial sources of Quentin's tortured psyche. Quentin's past is rendered in two distinct, but thematically-related, episodes concerning his role as protector of his sister's honor. The first episode deals with Caddy and Quentin at the branch, Caddy going to Dalton Ames, and returning to Quentin as they both return home. The second episode probably occurs a few days later when Quentin confronts Dalton Ames, then Caddy, after his failure to deal with Ames. Faulkner presents these two important episodes late in the monologue because they demonstrate most clearly the causes of Quentin's resolve to kill himself. Quentin's monologue ultimately concludes with his recollection of the conversation of nihilism and suicide with his father, conclusively demonstrating the sources of Quentin's tragedy.

In the first of these two tragic episodes from the past, Quentin finds Caddy lying "in the water her head on the sand spit the water flowing about her hips there was a little more light in the water her skirt half saturated flopped along her flanks to the waters motion" (149). We note the complete breakdown of syntactic order as Quentin regresses most pervasively into the past. Michael Millgate comments on the importance of this scene: "In his most agonizing recollections of Caddy, [Quentin] sees her at twilight, sitting in the cleansing waters of the branch and surrounded by the scent of honeysuckle, and these three elements of the scene--the twilight, the water, and the honeysuckle--take on an obsessive significance for Quentin . . ." (86). Throughout this painful scene, Quentin must confront his illusions about Caddy's purity and face the implications of her promiscuity. The ideas of honor and purity are central to their conversation about Dalton Ames:

hes crossed all the oceans all around the world

then she talked about him clasping her wet knees her face tilted
 back in the gray light the smell of honeysuckle. . .
 do you love him
 her hand came out I didnt move it fumbled down my arm and she
 held my hand flat against her chest her heart thudding
 no no
 did he make you then he made you do it let him he was stronger
 than you and he tomorrow Ill kill him I swear I will . . . (150)

Caddy is enamored by Ames's heroic stature, speaking wistfully and romantically about him. Quentin tries to speculate whether or not Dalton raped her. If Dalton had indeed raped her, Quentin would not have had to acknowledge the promiscuity of his sister, allowing him to shift his attention to Dalton's lechery rather than Caddy's sexuality. Like Hamlet, Quentin is bound up in a situation he did not create, but within which he is required to act. In both cases, a woman close to the protagonist (a mother in Hamlet's case, a sister in Quentin's) is threatened by the perceived forces of corrupting male evil, and the protagonist is socially responsible to protect and avenge. Quentin, like Hamlet, though in a less mature but no less evasive manner, finds he must test the corruptness of his situation. He repeatedly asks Caddy if she hates Dalton:

Caddy you hate him dont you
 she moved my hand up against her throat her heart was
 hammering there
 poor Quentin
 her face looked at the sky it was low so low that all smells and
 sounds of night seemed to have been crowded down. . .
 yes I hate him I would die for him Ive already died for him I die for
 him over and over again everytime this goes. (151)

Caddy's pulse and her suggestion of orgasm testify to her physical longing for Dalton. Whether or not Caddy actually loves Dalton is impossible to determine, but it is clear that she does not hate him. Referring to sex, Caddy says to Quentin, "youve never done that have you" (151). It is significant that Caddy not only has disregarded the Southern code, but in doing so she has surpassed

Quentin's own sexual experience--experience that Quentin finds inherently evil when he recognizes it in his sister. She exists in a realm of knowledge about which Quentin has little information, thus breaking the definitive boundaries that allow Quentin (and all other Southern males) to categorize her. As Hamlet struggles to understand his mother's motives in her "o'er-hasty" marriage to Claudius and her "post[ing] / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets" (2.2.57; 1.2.156-57) , Quentin wrestles with Caddy's precipitate sexuality. Both are forced to confront a significant female's manifest sexuality, and eventually both are called by to confront the aggressors, Claudius and Dalton, respectively.

Quentin recognizes his failure to protect his sister, as well as his own lack of experiential knowledge, and after his vociferous, yet untrue, proclamations of his own virility, he begins to cry. Faulkner intuitively combines all symbolic elements of the novel at this point when Quentin asks, "do you remember the day damuddy died when you sat down in the water in your drawers" (151). He recognizes Caddy's fallen nature and his own ineptitude in preventing her fall. The psychic pain of this realization paired with his inability to understand Caddy's independence from him brings Quentin to the point of murder-suicide. He takes his knife (loaded with all of its phallic implications) and holds it to Caddy's throat: "I held the point of the knife at her throat / it wont take but a second just a second then I can do mine I can do mine then" (152). Quentin is unable to follow through, however, and, symbolizing his own impotence, drops the knife, his second failure of the episode. Like Hamlet, Quentin is unable to take action. He has more than enough information to verify that Dalton Ames has seduced his sister, and he seems intuitively to understand that he cannot conquer Ames, so his logic moves to suicide. Quentin is much weaker than

Hamlet, whose speculations on self-destruction in his "to be or not to be" soliloquy are intimately involved with acting on the external world. Quentin's first impulse here is to kill his sister, then himself, a much more internal and, one may argue, solipsistic focus. But, like Hamlet, he finds that he cannot follow through on his resolution. They both think too much, and for both "the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" (3.1.84-85). We know, however, that it would be wrong for Quentin to follow through, though we are not quite so certain regarding Hamlet.

Faulkner renders Quentin's despair over his failure powerfully. He follows Caddy to her pre-arranged meeting with Dalton Ames. After he leaves Caddy with the unconfronted Ames, Quentin wanders along the edge of the woods, unable to follow his sister into the mythical "dark forest." Eventually, following the lovers' tryst, Caddy finds him, and he tells her to return home. Getting up to escort her home, Quentin describes the twilight: "outside the gray light the shadows of things like dead things in stagnant water" (157). All things have become gray and dark, and the river of time has stopped flowing, becoming stagnant--foul and infested from lack of motion, suggesting symbolically that Quentin will never be able to proceed beyond the initial tragedy within which he is currently embroiled. Because he is crying again, Caddy tries to absolve Quentin of his failure to protect her honor: "dont cry Im bad anyway you cant help it", to which Quentin responds, "theres a curse on us its not our fault is it our fault . . . theres a curse on us" (158), calling to mind the curse of the house of Atreus. At the conclusion of this episode, the first of his two painful recollections, Quentin has failed to protect Caddy's honor, and he has failed to come to terms with the fact that Caddy does not reflect the chastity

required of the pure Southern belle. Both he and Caddy suffer under the curse of the modern South, stripped of its romantic sensibility and illusion. Quentin recognizes the defilement of Southern ideology, and, like Hamlet, he recognizes that "time is out of joint." After turning away from suicide, Quentin believes that he can "set it right" by confronting Ames, Quentin's own personified "sea of troubles." But as readers, we already understand that both Quentin's consciousness and Southern ideology have become "dead things in stagnant water." Quentin is not yet ready to abandon these ideals, however, as reflected in the second episode that he remembers.

In the next episode, Quentin confronts Dalton Ames, yet is powerless to act in the noble and potent manner required of a brother defending his sister's honor. He expects to confront Ames with the clichéd ultimatum that he leave town by sundown or else. This, of course, turns for Quentin into a humiliating debacle where his pride is completely eradicated by Dalton's superiority. Like Caddy, Dalton pities Quentin and attempts to salve his injured pride. His pejorative reference to Quentin's sister ("theyre all bitches" (160)) enrages Quentin, and he weakly tries to hit Dalton, who renders Quentin powerless. Dalton displays his deftness with the gun (complete with all its phallic implications, as with the knife earlier), and offers it to Quentin, saying, "youll need it from what you said Im giving you this one because youve seen what itll do" (161). Quentin refuses and tries to hit Ames again. But Quentin faints. Upon awaking, Dalton lies to him, telling him that he did hit him, and then rides away, leaving Quentin physically and emotionally defeated. Faulkner represents Quentin's vanquishment in a passage that is full of natural symbolism, which further illustrates Quentin's tragic characteristics:

I leaned on the rail looking at the water I heard him untie the horse and ride off and after a while I couldn't hear anything but the water and then the bird again I left the bridge and sat down with my back against a tree and leaned my head against the tree and shut my eyes a patch of sun came through and fell across my eyes and I moved a little further around the tree I heard the bird again and the water and then everything sort of rolled away and I didn't feel anything at all I felt almost good after all those days and the nights with honeysuckle coming up out of the darkness into my room where I was trying to sleep even when after a while I knew that he hadn't hit me that he had lied about that for her sake too and that I had just passed out like a girl but even that didn't matter anymore and I sat there against the tree with little flecks of sunlight brushing across my face. . . . (162)

Quentin has made his symbolic transition across the bridge from his attempts at action and potency into a world of failure and defeat. He hears the water of time and knows he cannot escape the fact that he has failed to fulfill the heroic code of the Southern gentleman. His defeat comes almost as relief from his torment. Now he knows he has failed, and because of this failure, everything rolls away, leaving Quentin feeling lifeless and numb. At this point of almost complete negation, Caddy comes riding up on the horse, an archetypal symbol of sexual prowess and potency, the final insult. In this episode, Quentin reminds us of a tortured Hamlet who comes face to face with his own inadequacy. Though Hamlet seems more heroic in his resolve, both are plagued by their failures to shape events. Quentin recognizes the complete inadequacy of his existence in the South where all the guiding tenets of the past have proven impotent.

Both literally and symbolically, Quentin is completely defeated, and shortly thereafter, Caddy is engaged to Herbert Head and Quentin is figuratively banished to Harvard. He goes north shortly after his failed quest to save Caddy, and textually, he returns to complete consciousness in the narrative present,

returning to the field of his current tragedy, soon after his fight with Gerald Bland.

At this point, we are fully aware of the totality of Quentin's failure in the past. He was unable to preserve Caddy's purity, and he was unable to fulfill the role of the noble brother defending his sister's besmirched honor. Faulkner has prepared us now for the full revelation of Quentin's thought processes surrounding his suicidal resolution. Returning to Harvard in the evening, riding on the train--symbolizing fate and possibly suggesting suicide (Anna Karenina was one of Faulkner's favorite books (Gwynn and Blotner 150))--Quentin remembers struggling to sleep when he was at home after the experiences with Caddy and Dalton Ames, revealing his complex conceptualizations on negation and despair:

Sometimes I could put myself to sleep saying [when will it stop] over and over until after the honeysuckle got all mixed up in it the whole thing came to symbolize night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of gray halfnight where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent in themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who. (170)

Quentin's despair has eliminated any hope of salvation--Jesus is no longer walking down lightrays as at the beginning of his monologue. The light of morning has been diminished into twilight where nothing is clearly visible. All Quentin's actions and motivations in the past have become "shadowy paradoxical," lacking any "stable" and recognizable form. For a moment, Quentin's language reflects Macbeth's in his tortured "To-morrow and to-morrow" soliloquy. Quentin's experiences "should have affirmed" some "inherent relevance," yet he has come to think in convoluted patterns that twist

past and present, being and nothingness. In terms of "I was I was not who was not was not who," Hamlet's "To be or not to be" becomes simple philosophical rhetoric. Failing to think in a present tense that implies a future, as in "to be or not to be," Quentin speculates completely from the past tense, wondering whether he "was" or "was not." Because Quentin was unable "to be" according to the mores of the Southern code, he wonders whether he has existed at all. Like Hamlet, Quentin's beliefs about himself are inextricably and existentially bound up with his actions and failures. Quentin displays a more convoluted and psychologically destructive mindset, however, in the very fact that he verifies any true existence only inasmuch as it subscribes to the Southern code of honor. He speculates that if he did not act according to the social mores, then he did not in any true sense exist.

The conclusion of Quentin's monologue demonstrates the incorporation of his father's nihilism into Quentin's consciousness as the chapter descends peacefully to its abnegating close: "she [Caddy] couldn't see that Father was teaching us 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" (175-76). All have become Macbeth's poor player upon the stage, impotent and insignificant walking shadows, even Christ. It is crucial that we understand Quentin's perspective on Christ because Quentin's choices and thoughts run in direct contradistinction to Christian ideology, an opposition common to many tragic protagonists. Quentin's resistance to Christian ideology displays his tragic proportions. First of all, Faulkner represents Quentin's perspective symbolically. June 2, 1910, fell on a Thursday, perhaps symbolizing that

Quentin's section completes the Passion Week suggested by the other sections of the novel, and that Quentin's last day symbolically resonates with and against Christ's day and night of suffering before his crucifixion (Ross and Polk 43). If we follow the parallels, we can see that Quentin's resolutions directly contradict those of Christ, and incidentally those of Hamlet. Christ suffered the crisis of identity and consciousness in Gethsemane, coming to the resolution that God's will would be done rather than his own. He sacrifices his own desires in submission to a more powerful and authoritative force. Hamlet comes to a similar conclusion as a result of his own suffering. In speaking of death, Hamlet states, "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it [death] be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now; yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man, of aught he leaves, knows aught, what is 't to leave betimes? Let be" (5.2.215-20). Hamlet comes to understand of his own ignorance about fate and the phenomenal world. His response to the question of "to be or not to be" is a simple "let be." He understands that death will come when it will come, and that the most anyone can do is to exist in the temporal world.

Quentin, however, refuses to relinquish control. Even after he has failed in his resolution to protect and defend Southern honor, and after he has failed to come to terms with his physical and emotional defeat, failing even to keep the past from intruding upon his present, Quentin still tries to seize control over death and negation. He absorbs his father's destructive precepts on life's meaninglessness and resolves completely to kill himself rather than let the meaninglessness of the phenomenal world conquer him and his despair.

Quentin seeks to vanquish and transcend the phenomenal world, accepting his father's view of the world and refusing to exist in it.

Faulkner displays Quentin's convoluted and irrational psychology throughout the remembered discussion between him and his father at the conclusion of the chapter. It is interesting to note that Hamlet's most significant contact with his father comes at the beginning of the play, while Quentin's is revealed to us at the end of the chapter. Yet both fathers' ideas poison their sons' views of the world. Hamlet's father's ghost gives to Hamlet the conflict he will struggle with and against throughout the play. Quentin's father, arguably a form of the living dead as well, conveys to Quentin the philosophical nihilism that will invade and fester in his mind throughout his monologue. The complete incorporation of and ironic reaction against Mr. Compson's nihilism, emblemized in Quentin's resolve to kill himself, is illustrated in the penultimate paragraph of Quentin's monologue. Ironically enough, Quentin remembers a conversation with his father about life and suicide, where Mr. Compson initially tries to illuminate the true qualities of suicide while trying to console Quentin in his existential despair. Mr. Compson fails, however. Michael Millgate notes that Mr. Compson "has become, indeed, Quentin's principle enemy" (95).

We see a connection between the influences of Hamlet's father and Quentin's. Both initiate and complicate their sons' lives, prescribing codes of behavior and systems of belief that further corrupt their sons' already dissolute worlds. Hamlet's father's ghost puts Hamlet in the no-win situation of avenging his murder by murdering his murderer. Mr. Compson's nihilism insidiously infests Quentin's view of the phenomenal world, pushing him into his downward spiral. As John T. Irwin instructively points out, Quentin has learned and reacts

against Mr. Compson's message on the meaninglessness of life at the hand of Time:

If man is the sum of his misfortunes and if time is his misfortune, then a man is not one who exerts his will and does things but one to whom things simply happen inevitably in the irresistible flow of time, a man is essentially impotent. And it is precisely against this sense of man's impotence in the grip of time that Quentin struggles. (68)

Faulkner expresses Quentin's demise stylistically. As Noel Polk argues, the complete abandonment of punctuation and the use of the lower case personal pronoun syntactically reflects Quentin's complete abandonment of order, of any possible division between past and present, and of the complete disintegration of the self. Mr. Compson tells Quentin that "we must just stay awake and see evil done for a little while its not always" and that "every man is the arbiter of his own virtues" (176). In other words, Quentin need not evaluate himself too harshly. Actions and failures are not important. People can evaluate their actions from any stance they desire. Furthermore, we can see that Mr. Compson reflects Hamlet's own ideology--"there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (2.2.249-50)--before he comes to his realizations about death at the end of the play.

Quentin has gone beyond this ideology, however. He cannot stop thinking, and he cannot stop thinking that he has failed in the phenomenal world. Regarding his incestuous desires and his lie about committing incest, Quentin tells his father, "it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it [Caddy's loss of virginity] had never been" (177). He states that he was afraid to try to make Caddy commit incest because he was afraid she might do it and then the act "wouldnt have done any good," because Caddy would still have

lost her virginity. Drawing on Olga Vickery's analysis, Daniel Singal presents Quentin's psychology aptly:

To Quentin even eternal imprisonment in hell is better than mortality--so long as it is the transcendent hell that he has devised in his imagination. That is why he does not really wish to commit incest but only to confess to it; actualizing his fantasy, notes Vickery would ruin everything "by involving him in the terrible reality of experience." Or, as Quentin puts it to his father, had Caddy in fact consented, "it wouldnt have done any good but if i could tell you we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be so and then the world would roar away." (123-24)

Mr. Compson understands the tragic dimensions of Quentin's vision:

"you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh" (177). Mr.

Compson understands the true nature of the tragic figure, and proves to be even more insightful regarding his son: "you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this." He realizes that Quentin does not want to give in to the entropic and diminishing effects of time. David Minter elaborates upon this idea: "But beyond the failure [Quentin] experiences lies the failure he anticipates, a moment when Caddy's corruption no longer matters to him.

Suicide thus completes his commitment to the only role left him, that of the despairing lover. . . . In Quentin it is not only immediate failure that we observe; it is the prospect of ultimate failure" (William Faulkner 100). Warwick

Wadlington adds to the commentary: "If Quentin cannot have his exclusive One, Caddy, then he desires permanent grief over the loss . . . but then to be faced with the loss of suffering too is unthinkable" (366). He wishes to preserve himself in a continual state of despair that exists beyond time, thus conquering time. Quentin imagines living eternally in some perpetual hell where his despair will continue unabated beyond the reach of time's diminishing effects.

To understand Quentin's logic, we must come to understand the pervasiveness of his pessimism.

Quentin has absorbed completely the nihilism of Mr. Compson's beliefs about the phenomenal world. Mr. Compson has told him all along that nothing is very important. He tells his son that "no man ever does that [commits suicide] under the first fury of despair or remorse or bereavement he does it only when he has realized that even the despair or remorse or bereavement is not particularly important to the dark diceman" (178). He is telling Quentin that no man kills himself until he realizes how insignificant all of these feelings are in any ultimate sense. Because Mr. Compson has been teaching Quentin that human consciousness is powerless to conquer the abnegating forces surrounding it, and that this realization is what leads people to suicide, he has in effect been teaching Quentin all along to commit suicide. Paradoxically, Quentin intuitively accepts Mr. Compson's theory on the dissipation of despair, yet he refuses to permit this to occur. Rather than have despair fade in time, he will kill himself into a state of perpetual despair. He accepts Mr. Compson's nihilistic view of the futility of human endeavor, yet by choosing suicide he believes that he will in effect transcend the erosive qualities of time and, thus, exist forever in an apotheosis of human despair. Thus Faulkner can write of Quentin in the "Compson Appendix,"

Who loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of its eternal punishment: he, not God, could by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal fires. But who loved death above all, who loved only death, loved and lived in a deliberate and almost perverted anticipation of death. . . (207-08)

Quentin resolves to replace God. He conceives that through his suicide he will exist in a perpetual and deathless state of death, irrevocably wed to his despair in timeless ruin. This resolution is the violent working out of Quentin's tragedy in the narrative present. He comes to his destruction because he has failed to conquer the phenomenal workings of the world and time. Much like Macbeth, Quentin refuses to succumb to the abnegating effects of time where all things are brought to insignificance. Quentin would rather exist in a torturous and eternal hell where his grief lives beyond time and decay, than in the putrescent and saprophagous world.

At the core of Quentin's crises is his inability to act in effective ways. Like Hamlet, Quentin is unable to control external events, though he believes he should be able to. He believes he should have been able to protect his sister's honor, and once she was violated, he believes he should be able to take revenge upon the violating agent. Confronting the ghosts of Southern codes of honor and duty on one hand and his father's nihilism on the other, Quentin finds himself in a no-win situation, an ambiguous morass shifting constantly under the "minute clicking of little wheels." Like Hamlet, Quentin perceives a world that seems to have abandoned the ideals of codes that, in the past, dictated behavior in clear-cut fashion. Hamlet and Quentin have difficulty interacting with a world where the codes of the past have been overcome by "things rank and gross in nature," and they choose instead to retreat into their own cerebral arguments regarding existence. Each comes to realize, however, that despite his own cogitations, the world moves on, and he cannot escape the forces that continue to act upon him. Whereas Hamlet accepts forces of "providence" or "fate" more powerful than himself, Quentin resolves to conquer them through

suicide, vanquishing time, existing forever in the hereafter, an "apotheosis," where he "will not even be dead" (177), and where his despair will never fade.

Chapter Three: Jason Compson: "Injury and impotence feeding upon its own sound"

While Quentin's actions are dictated by his illusions about the past and the outworn codes that have ceased to benefit a world that has progressed beyond Southern gentility, Jason Compson is consciously obsessed with obtaining a secure future through material gain. Cleanth Brooks is correct in his belief that Jason is "fixated on an illusory future" (First Encounters 60). Jason is, of course, completely unaware that the future he desires is an illusion. Like Quentin, however, Jason's unconscious drives pull him back to the past from which he so desperately wishes to escape. Though he has repudiated the Southern code (Brooks, Yoknapatawpha 337), he still very much wants his house to appear as if it is in order. His fury at Miss Quentin's promiscuity stems much more from how she presents herself in the community than from any tainting of the Compson honor. In fact, when we look at how both Quentin and Jason respond to promiscuity (Quentin to Caddy's, Jason to Miss Quentin's) we see that they both frantically attempt to quell it, and they both fail to do so. To both brothers, Caddy's supposed sexual lasciviousness costs them something. Quentin loses the illusion of Southern gentility; Jason loses a potential job at the bank. They both struggle to fit their sister's actions into their solipsistic world views and find that their sister's actions are incompatible with those views. Quentin resolves to kill himself; Jason resolves to torture Caddy's daughter. Quentin retreats to an internal dialogue, musing on negation, while Jason charges forward, interacting with the world, determined to conquer it. We are tempted to think that Jason is strictly concerned about securing a future where he will not have to work so hard, but in truth Jason is not running forward to a

specific teleological end, but rather is fleeing from the demons of his own inadequacy. While Quentin's internal debate reflects Hamlet's philosophical wrestling with negation and action in a world where the old rules no longer apply, Jason's relentless attempts to control the world around him mirror Macbeth's ruthless quest for power, security, and safety on the throne. Jason chooses to confront the forces of negation by trying to deceive all those around him, constructing elaborate plans of extortion and manipulation. His anger, stemming from feelings of having been wronged by the world, underlies all of his motivations. He refuses to recognize his own powerlessness as a possible source of his failures, however, identifying external forces to blame for his plight. As a result, Jason believes that he can conquer all the surrounding forces.

Jason's life revolves around confrontation, and to some extent, all of his confrontations are in one way or another conflicts with negation. All of the external threats Jason perceives are manifestations of forces that hinder him from obtaining control over his world. It is in Jason's various responses to these threats that we perceive the paradox at the center of his being. Donald M. Kartiganer summarizes Jason's paradox: "Jason . . . confuses the real and the illusory, and is quite unaware of the way he arranges his own punishment. Standing between him and reality is his need to hold on to two opposing views of himself: one is that he is completely sufficient, the other is that he is the scapegoat of the world" (336). In essence, Jason must have control over external events, yet he often blames outside forces for his circumstances. He blames Caddy, and indirectly Miss Quentin, for his lost opportunity to work in the bank. He blames Jews in New York for his failures in the stock market. He blames the Negroes in his house for constantly draining his resources. He

blames his parents for not providing an education for him. He blames his brother Quentin for squandering his own opportunity at Harvard. In spite of all this, Jason goes through April 6 and April 8, 1928, desperately trying to get control over his mother, Benjy, Luster, Dilsey, and Miss Quentin. And throughout his flashbacks, we see him torturing Caddy. We are reminded of Macbeth identifying Malcolm, Banquo, and Macduff as threats to his security before plotting to destroy them. Whereas Hamlet and Quentin ponder their own impotence and inability to function in the face of negation, Macbeth and Jason refuse to find impotence within, and rather target forces in the external world to vilify and overcome.

At significant points, both Macbeth and Jason plunge into a confrontation with the forces of negation. As Macbeth resolves to visit the witches, proclaiming "I am in blood / Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er" (3.4.135-37), Jason plunges into the literal and symbolic woods to track down his niece, as he relates in the middle of his monologue. Unlike his brother Quentin's hesitation at the borders of the tangled wood, Jason plunges headlong into the forest when pursuing Miss Quentin and the man in the red tie. His immersion into the woods symbolizes his blind determination to confront the forces of non-being head-on. He fails to appreciate the true nature of these forces and becomes disoriented:

[W]hen I got into the woods it was full of underbrush and I had to twist around through it, and then I came to a ditch full of briars. I went along it for a while, but it got thicker and thicker. . . . When I finally got through I had had to wind around so much that I had to stop and figure out just where the car would be. . . . I went on, trying to move quiet, then I heard a dog or something and I knew that when he scented me he'd have to come helling up. . . . I had gotten beggar lice and twigs and stuff all over me, inside my clothes and shoes and all, and then I happened to look around and I had my hand right on a bunch of poison oak. The only thing I

couldn't understand was why it was just poison oak and not a snake or something. So I didn't even bother to move it. I just stood there until the dog went away. Then I went on. (240-41)

Jason completely immerses himself in the tangled wood in his attempt to find Miss Quentin and the man with the red tie. The passage is rich with suggestive detail. Faulkner intertwines ironic Edenic imagery with danger and confusion: Jason fully expects the serpent to be not only in the wilderness, but right next to him, a threat. In fact, the dog that comes "helling up" reminds us of Cerberus, the watchdog with three heads, a snake's tail, and a row of serpent heads growing out of his back that guards the gate to the underworld in Greek mythology, suggesting that Jason is really venturing into the realm of the dead. He comes into contact with everything discomfiting in the woods, from twigs and prickly seed-pods to poison oak, yet he continues to go on.

This episode at the end of his monologue illustrates Jason's belief in his own non-contingency. Regardless of the fact that he blames much of the world for his own low station, he moves throughout Jefferson with a belief that he can control events. This belief has no foundation in reality, however. Though he tortures both Caddy and Miss Quentin, he has no real control over anything. Cleanth Brooks points out Jason's financial impotence:

He has retained his job in the hardware store because Earl is sorry for his mother. Jason's speculations in the market have shown no special shrewdness. On the day that we see Jason in action, his account is sold out for lack of margin. His automobile has been bought with money got from his mother under false pretenses. An important amount of Jason's income is derived from funds that Caddy has provided for Quentin's clothes and upkeep, funds from which Jason is systematically stealing. (First Encounters 65-66)

Brooks illustrates Jason's financial dependence while simultaneously identifying his most routinely employed tactic for acquiring power--deception.

Throughout the novel Jason deceives almost everyone. Early in his monologue he double-crosses Caddy, tricking her into paying to "see" her daughter. He keeps Miss Quentin from seeing how much money her mother has wired. He creates an elaborate ruse to make his mother believe that she is burning the checks Caddy sends while keeping the money for himself. And it is fascinating that Jason's rage is most intense when Miss Quentin steals that money from him, in essence foiling his deception. Jason lies to Earl throughout the day regarding his own whereabouts, and is then angry when news of the stock market never reaches him.

Despite his failures, Jason believes himself to be the most practical of all the Compsons, developing his actions and deceptions from a quasi-rational perspective, like all good liars. It is tempting, then, to read literally Faulkner's claim that Jason is "the first sane Compson since before Culloden . . . Logical rational contained and even a philosopher in the old stoic tradition" (Appendix 212). We must agree with Cleanth Brooks, however: "But though Jason's ostensible code is purely practical, reducing every action to its cash value, his conduct has in fact its nonpractical aspect. For Jason harbors a great deal of nonpractical and irrational bitterness, even sadism" (Yoknapatawpha 337). Undeniably, Jason tortures everyone he believes weaker than himself, from Luster to Miss Quentin.

Jason's anger traps him in an endless cycle. Initially, we might conclude that Jason is more concerned with the poor reputation Miss Quentin's promiscuity is bringing to the Compson family. Jason states, "Like I say it's not that [promiscuity] I object to so much; maybe she cant help that, it's because she hasn't even got enough consideration for her own family to have any discretion.

I'm afraid all the time I'll run into them right in the middle of the street or under a wagon on the square like a couple of dogs" (240). But at this point in the monologue they are nowhere near town. In fact, they are in the woods. Jason chases her into the wilderness where she is not likely to be seen by anyone.

Jason perceives in Miss Quentin more than just a threat to the Compson name. Miss Quentin comes to personify all of his own impotence. Unconsciously, Jason's niece represents to him the reason for his failure to secure a prominent banking position. On a deeper level, she represents Caddy's refusal to succumb to Southern codes of behavior. But on the deepest levels of Jason's unconscious, Miss Quentin personifies his own powerlessness in the face of death, a weakness first demonstrated by his antipathy towards Caddy's climbing the pear tree to view Damuddy's funeral, and further augmented by Miss Quentin's escape via the same tree. Damuddy's death plagues the young Jason whom we deduce was quite close to his grandmother, possibly the only source of love he knew. On the night of her funeral Jason wants "to sleep with Damuddy," and cries because he cannot (73). It is significant that Miss Quentin lives in Damuddy's old room (a figurative and, for a brief time in 1900, a literal tomb) intruding upon Jason's possible idealization of his grandmother.

The connections with death and negation surrounding the tree outside Damuddy's room are crucial in understanding Jason's past, as are his conscious and unconscious perspectives on non-being in the narrative present. In Benjy's section, Faulkner goes to great lengths to suggest the Edenic parallels Caddy's climbing of the tree suggest and its impact upon Jason. Versh tells Caddy, " 'Your paw told you to stay out of that tree' " (39), ironically

reminiscent of God's command to stay away from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, telling Adam and Eve that they would die upon eating the fruit. Earlier in the section, we are told, "A snake crawled out from under the house. Jason said he wasn't afraid of snakes and Caddy said he was but she wasn't" (37). After climbing the tree, Caddy is identified with the serpent. When Jason tattles to Dilsey about Caddy climbing the tree, she says, "'You, Satan, . . . [c]ome down from there" (45). Jason identifies Damuddy's death with Caddy's willfulness, and furthermore, with a courage that he himself does not possess. We can argue that Jason, either consciously or unconsciously, holds Caddy responsible for the loss of anything he himself desires. Her eventual marriage to and separation from Herbert Head, causing the loss of Jason's potential banking job, further augment his identification of Caddy with his own loss and powerlessness.

Later, Miss Quentin represents the living death of Jason's own impotence. She lives in the room in which Damuddy died, and where Caddy gazed upon death firsthand. The phenomena that Jason feared in his youth, death, powerlessness, and negation, come to be personified in Miss Quentin in the narrative present. Therefore, if Jason can control her, he can in essence conquer non-being. Indeed, this is why he so furiously pursues her throughout his section and the final section of the novel, though he consciously regards Miss Quentin as "[t]he bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother's life every day and made my name a laughing stock in the town" (304).

Earlier in Jason's monologue, Faulkner suggests the unconscious aspects of Jason's conflict with non-being in the syntactic breakdown Faulkner

employs with such strength in Quentin's section. Jason's loss of conscious control is minimal compared to Quentin's, but when the syntactic breakdown does occur in Jason's section, he is enraged after losing Miss Quentin and the man with the red tie. The implication that he has failed to control the forces of non-being within the narrative present causes him to revert to the past in a long diatribe condemning everyone in his life, from Mr. and Mrs. Compson to his mistress Lorraine. He regains psychological control quickly, however, and continues his pursuit of his niece.

The fact that Miss Quentin's repudiation of the Southern moral code through sexual promiscuity so closely parallels Caddy's, further provokes Jason's resolve and need to control her. So, like Quentin, Jason wrestles to contain and conquer a past that erupts into the present. But where Quentin fights ghosts, Jason confronts a physical manifestation of his own past failures. Because he must control Miss Quentin, Jason is just as much prevented from moving forward as his two brothers. It is striking, in fact, to recognize that Jason always "spells," or "thinks," the condemnatory "damn" as "dam," suggesting that Jason's damnation is trammelled up in his own attempt to dam up the river of time, preventing any progress through time, a progress that is reliant upon coming to terms with his own powerlessness over the forces of non-being in the world. But Jason is incapable of realizing his own impotence. In Jason we are reminded of Macbeth, who identifies external agents upon whom to act in order to counteract his own feelings of powerlessness. Banquo, whose sons will claim the throne, and Macduff, whose prowess and nobility Macbeth both lacks and fears, represent the perceived forces of negation he must defeat.

More strikingly, Jason, like Macbeth, believes that he has the whole picture. Except for the information on the stock market, Jason never once doubts his own perspicacity. Olga Vickery writes, "One of Jason's dominant characteristics . . . is his pride that he has no illusions about his family or himself. . . . He cannot imagine that there might be other facts, other aspects of the situation, than the ones that directly affect him; as a result, he sees certain things so clearly that all others escape him" (42-43). Jason demonstrates completely "mortals' chiefest enemy," an over-confidence in his own perception of the world around him (Macbeth 3.5.33). Like Macbeth, he calls "fate into the list," assuming a godlike mantle (3.1.70). Faulkner goes to pains to suggest Jason's impulse to conquer the forces of non-being. When Jason is blackmailing Caddy into giving him money to take care of Miss Quentin--the most explicit manifestation of control Jason ever has over her--she says to him, "'Oh God, oh God'" (210), suggesting Jason's efforts to apotheosize himself. In the narrative present, when Jason is forcing Miss Quentin to endorse the money order from Caddy, he says, " 'You've got to learn one thing, and that is that when I tell you to do something, you've got to do it.' " Miss Quentin says, " 'Oh God, oh God,' " to which Jason responds, " 'Yes,' I says. 'That's one thing you'll have to learn if you never learn anything else' " (215). Whether Jason means that Miss Quentin must learn that she must do whatever Jason says or that he is God, Faulkner leaves to the reader to determine. Jason consistently believes in his own self-sufficiency: "Besides, like I say I guess I dont need any man's help to get along I can stand on my own feet like I always have" (206), and later, "I can stand on my own feet; I dont need any man's mahogany desk to prop me up" (211).

To further demonstrate Jason's tragic drive to transcend the phenomenal world, Faulkner employs biblical allusions to express Jason's godly aspirations. Jason uses the Bible to control Dilsey by pointing to a passage "where a man's flesh rotted off" due to leprosy (207), suggesting that Dilsey has leprosy and is in danger of spreading it: "I told her if she ever looked at her [Caddy] or Ben or Quentin they'd catch it too" (207). Stephen Ross and Noel Polk suggest that Jason points to Zechariah 14:12: "And this shall be the plague wherewith the Lord will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth" (162). If this is indeed the passage Jason refers to, he is conceivably either Jerusalem, the chosen of God, or God himself smiting those who oppose his wishes with leprosy, demonstrating the tragic protagonist's belief that he is more powerful than the forces around him. Another passage Jason might have read to Dilsey is 2 Chronicles 26: 16 ff.: "But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense." When he is chastised by Azariah and other priests, "Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the Lord's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. . . . King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house--leprous, and excluded from the temple of the Lord." This is probably more apt a passage for Jason (and Faulkner) to select. It can very easily apply to Dilsey's meddling in Jason's efforts to control Caddy and Miss Quentin. Dilsey is invading the temple of Jason's plans, assuming more power

than she has a right to. The passage suggests consequences for unfaithfulness, and there is also the implied threat of exile, that Dilsey may be banished from the house if she continues to interfere. The passage resonates even more fully if we realize that Jason is unconsciously illustrating his own condition. Regarding Caddy and Miss Quentin, Jason has become powerful, and as a result, is filled with pride. He has taken on a role higher than his station affords him. While he believes that he is expressing his own godlike power to Dilsey, he is expressing his tragic pride to the reader. In all probability, Jason never consciously identifies himself with Uzziah, but rather with God, who strikes down those who oppose him. Ironically, we recognize the tragic implications of Jason's mistake. We as readers understand that Jason has usurped more power than a human being of his station can rightfully assume. As a result, we expect a tragic fall.

In the last section of the novel, Faulkner continues to demonstrate Jason's belief in non-contingency. When Jason confronts the sheriff, Faulkner presents the most glaring example of Jason's drive to conquer the perceived forces of non-being, most explicitly the sheriff himself:

"I'm Jason Compson. See if you can stop me. See if you can elect a man to office that can stop me," he said, thinking of himself entering the courthouse with a file of soldiers and dragging the sheriff out. . . . The air brightened, the running shadow patches were now the obverse, and it seemed to him that the fact that the day was clearing was another cunning stroke on the part of the foe, the fresh battle toward which he was carrying ancient wounds. From time to time he passed churches, unpainted frame buildings with sheet iron steeples, surrounded by tethered teams and shabby motorcars, and it seemed to him that each of them was a picketpost where the rear guards of Circumstance peeped fleetingly back at him. "And damn You, too," he said. "See if You can stop me," thinking of himself, his file of soldiers with the manacled sheriff in the rear, dragging Omnipotence down from his throne, if necessary; of the embattled legions of both hell and

heaven through which he tore his way and put his hands at last on his fleeing niece. (306)

In this passage Jason most closely resembles Macbeth. Jason's own shadow is reversed within his mind--he becomes all-powerful, damning (spelled correctly because Faulkner is narrating the final section) God himself to hell, dragging Omnipotence down, tearing through all the forces of heaven and hell to capture Miss Quentin. In his imagination, Jason conquers all the forces of Circumstance. Faulkner reports that Jason "could see the opposed forces of his destiny and his will drawing swiftly together now, toward a junction that would be irrevocable; he became cunning" (307). Jason fully believes that he can defeat destiny through the sheer power of his will.

Jason is defeated, however. Symbolically, he confronts death in the shape of the old man in the abandoned pullman cars on the train tracks, and is quickly overcome, despite the old man's frailty. He comes at Jason with a rusty hatchet, a symbolic Grim Reaper of sorts, and knocks Jason down the stairs, almost into unconsciousness, despite Jason's "furious desire not to die" (310-11), the ultimate demonstration of contingency, proving that Jason never was a match for the forces of non-being surrounding him. After he is "saved" by the leader of the troupe, Jason is vanquished for all intents and purposes. He realizes that he has lost Miss Quentin again, this time forever. All he can do, with his throbbing headache, is go back to the car that he can no longer drive:

He sat there for some time. He heard a clock strike the half hour, then people began to pass, in Sunday and easter clothes. Some looked at him as they passed, at the man sitting quietly behind the wheel of a small car, with his invisible life ravelled out about him like a wornout sock . . . (313)

Though Jason is not physically destroyed, his world is shattered. Vickery writes, "Still isolated and unrepentant, Jason survives while Quentin is destroyed by

the events he can neither accept nor control. On the other hand, that survival is itself futile, for Jason is the last of the Compson line and a childless bachelor" (46). The tolling of the clock-chime demonstrates the victory of time and circumstance over Jason's attempts to control them. His life has become as meaningless as a wornout sock. Though he does not die with the heroism of Macbeth, refusing to relent to the very end, we cannot help but think about Macbeth's "poor Player," strutting and fretting his hour upon the stage and then heard no more. Jason's life is one of futility, where all his actions eventually become insignificant.

Chapter Four: Thomas Sutpen: Murmuring of Tomorrow Beyond the Immediate Fury

In The Sound and the Fury Faulkner creates sharply delineated monologues demonstrating the effects of Caddy Compson upon her brothers' psyches. We are privy to the tragic dimensions of Quentin's and Jason's consciousnesses firsthand. Absalom, Absalom!, on the other hand, demonstrates Faulkner's most ambitious attempt to break down boundaries of consciousness, illuminating the permeation of the tragic sense of life across people and time. In this novel, we do not have single narratives, as in The Sound and the Fury, where the past weaves in and out of an evolving narrative present. Instead, Faulkner presents monologues within monologues where there is a convolution of objectivity and subjectivity, forcing us not only to discover the "true" Sutpen tragic history, but in many ways to experience the dawning realization that that tragedy is not separate and distinct from our own evolving history.

While Quentin and Jason Compson of The Sound and the Fury are tragic protagonists in unique and distinct ways, the characters of Absalom, Absalom! operate under a dominating and pervasive tragic history where tragedy itself seems to be the main character, where all other characters are facets of one tragic totality, reflecting and refracting the light of the tragic sense of life. As Macbeth and Hamlet represent ends of a spectrum of Shakespeare's tragic protagonists, The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! represent the ends of Faulkner's tragic continuum between which the rest of Faulkner's tragic novels may be placed, including Light in August and If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem. The Sound and the Fury demonstrates the individual psyche,

sharply distinguished from external social and physical forces; Absalom. Absalom! demonstrates the opposite end of the continuum where the perspective shifts from the individual psyche to the qualities of the invading and pervading tragic sense of life. The tragic substance in Absalom. Absalom! is initially personified in the character of Thomas Sutpen.

Cleanth Brooks writes, "Perhaps the most praiseworthy aspect of Faulkner is his ability to create a character of heroic proportions and to invest his downfall with something like tragic dignity" (Yoknapatawpha Country 307). As he does to Rosa Coldfield's, Mr. Compson's, Quentin's and Shreve's, Thomas Sutpen invades our consciousness in his straightforward assault upon a universe destined to limit him. Thomas Sutpen is arguably the most strictly formal of Faulkner's tragic creations. He is a figure bent on his "design" and, to the very end, refuses to concede defeat to the powers of negation. He possesses the Aristotelian *hubris* combined with heroic strength and resolve. Yet Sutpen rises beyond mere formulaic tragedy. Despite ourselves, we agree when Mr. Compson says that Sutpen becomes "the apotheosis lonely, explicable, beyond all human fouling" (230). Faulkner deftly creates a character, like Macbeth, whom we may despise for his ruthlessness and complete lack of interest in any human life foreign to his design, but whom we eventually find ourselves admiring for his tenacious will to conquer the forces of his universe. Harold Bloom writes of Macbeth, "The universal reaction to Macbeth is that we identify with him. . . . Shakespeare rather dreadfully sees to it that *we are* Macbeth; our identity with him is involuntary but inescapable" (Shakespeare 517). We experience the same with Thomas Sutpen, and this concept is demonstrated through the various characters in the text; it is, indeed,

central to an adequate understanding of the text that we recognize that what affects the characters so much is not that they are so different from Sutpen but that he reflects crises that they (and we) continue to confront. And the central component of the affected characters in the text, and within ourselves as readers, is the terrifying confrontation with non-being. Sutpen struggles to create for himself his own identity, repudiating his impoverished roots while striving to acquire an elusive respectability that can elevate him above the surrounding Southern gentry. He longs to create his own identity free from, yet influenced by, his environment. Thomas Sutpen is us and not us simultaneously. The emotions we feel towards Macbeth we also feel towards Sutpen.

Thomas Sutpen closely resembles Macbeth. Throughout most of the text, we are denied access to Sutpen's thoughts and deliberations. Only midway through the novel, when Quentin is relating what Sutpen told Quentin's grandfather about his past, do we get any glimpse into Sutpen's motivations directly. Sutpen's actions are revealed by external and often biased sources. Sutpen, like Macbeth, dominates his stage of the South, desperately trying to control events in order to fulfill his design. Never does Sutpen stop and contemplate negation from a philosophically sophisticated perspective, as does Hamlet. Faulkner will save the existential deliberations for Quentin's and Shreve's analysis of him, and for Henry, Judith, and Charles. Thomas Sutpen represents the blind drive to overcome negation, and any contemplation of limits on his own part is restricted innocently to his failure to truly succeed, the "mistake" he discusses with (to) General Compson.

In his article, "Behind Closed Doors: The Unknowable and the Unknowing in Absalom, Absalom!," Heberden W. Ryan discusses the qualities of barriers to access and knowledge that pervade the text. He states, "Inevitably the most crucial moments of the story involve the crossing of some thresholds" (295). He goes on to explain one particular threshold for Sutpen, namely his attempt to become respectable, and his failure to succeed: "He can never cross that threshold in the Tidewater because he never quite understands and because he continues to believe that by following a simple recipe (such as marrying into an upstanding family), he can make himself respectable" (299). The similarities to Macbeth are striking. Macbeth, too, lacks the essential knowledge that his quest for the respect that comes with the throne is cut off from him. He laments in Act 5, "[T]he Thanes fly from me," and earlier, Angus states, "Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach: / Those he commands move only in command, / Nothing in love" (5.3.49, 5.2.18-20). But though Sutpen and Macbeth both fail in their bids for respectability, these are only symptoms of a deeper issue, that of conquering negation. The central threshold each wishes to cross is one from human and existential mortality into an apotheosized and transcendent immortality, though Sutpen would probably not consciously acknowledge his quest from this perspective.

Sutpen's desire, the foundation of his "design," is related to us through the various narrative constructions, and each is biased and limited in particular ways. Norman Markowitz argues that, due to this quality of obfuscation, the characters--and readers--are unable to "learn" anything at all in the text. Markowitz writes,

In Absalom, Absalom! there are no dialectical relationships, no stages of development, no process of understanding and change

through social interaction. Rather there are fixed ideas and fixed people against whom superhuman abstractions, hubris, incest, miscegenation, and murder collide, producing no understanding of either the past or the present. Finally, Faulkner's modernist frame and language is, for me, an armor against understanding his closed world, which may be his intent. (116)

His conclusions make sense if we are to limit Faulkner's text to an historical document relating the capitalistic qualities of Southern aristocracy and its demise after the Civil War, as Markowitz discusses throughout his article. Markowitz, however, sidesteps the main point of the novel as he discusses it in his article--the universal conflict waged between being and negation. Faulkner's intent is not to give us one "true" picture, as Markowitz desires, but rather to present varied perspectives on the unwinnable contest against time. Thus we *are* able to identify specific qualities concerning the tragic sense of life from all the narratives, something Markowitz seems unable to do. At the heart of Rosa's, Mr. Compson's, and Quentin and Shreve's constructions of the story of Thomas Sutpen is the awe inspired by Sutpen's attempt to transcend what Thomas MacFarland calls the "emphasized presence of non-being" (6). Sutpen becomes a reflection in the mirror of existence of all the narrators, and their reactions to Sutpen, who becomes a reversed reflection for each of the various narrators, illustrate the failures of each to either enter into (in Rosa's and Mr. Compson's case) or to win (in Quentin's) the battle with negation. In other words, Sutpen shows the various failures of each narrator by showing both of them what they are not. The unifying component and inherent meaning of Thomas Sutpen's place in Absalom, Absalom! is to demonstrate the tragic sense of life, to witness either first- or "second-hand" his doomed struggle against negation, the struggle that paradoxically extricates and illuminates the

transcendent qualities of human existence from the nothingness which surrounds us.

Macbeth attempts to become the controlling force of his universe, and early in the novel, Faulkner draws Sutpen along similar lines. From the beginning of the novel, Sutpen is portrayed in ironically God-like proportions "creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light* " (4). Power is irrefutably a central component to Sutpen's character, as illustrated in Quentin's grandfather's belief that "*Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything* " (35). Later in the text, Mr. Compson states that Wash Jones believes God "would look at Sutpen and think *A fine proud man. If God Himself was to come down and ride the natural earth, that's what He would aim to look like* " (226).

But Faulkner goes to pains to demonstrate that Sutpen is not a god, that beneath his godlike power and determination, he is a man who is "completely the slave of his secret and furious impatience, his conviction gained from whatever that recent experience had been--that fever mental or physical--of a need for haste, of time fleeing beneath him, which was to drive him for the next five years" (25). He is a man who, in Mr. Compson's words, possesses "fallible judgment"; he is "mortal clay" battling "against not only human but natural forces" (41). In the initial pages of the novel we are presented with a man who seems to bridge the gap between god and human, the perfect tragic protagonist, a man like us, but stronger. He is very much like Macbeth, having an insatiable determination to overcome, and indeed, conquering all obstacles initially. Whereas Macbeth becomes king by first vanquishing Macdonwald's

traitorous army, then murdering Duncan and wresting the throne from Malcolm, Sutpen becomes the

biggest single landowner and cotton-planter in the county . . . , which state he had attained by the same tactics with which he had built his house--the same singleminded unflagging effort and utter disregard of how his actions which the town could see might look and how the indicated ones which the town could not see must appear to it. . . . He was not liked (which he evidently did not want, anyway) but feared, which seemed to amuse, if not actually please, him. But he was accepted; he obviously had too much money now to be rejected or even seriously annoyed any more. (56-57).

Like Macbeth, Sutpen accomplishes his initial purpose early in the tragedy he acquires his land, his wife, and his "respectability."

And, also like Macbeth, "while he was still playing the scene to the audience, behind him fate, destiny, retribution, irony--the stage manager, call him what you will--was already striking the set and dragging on the synthetic and spurious shadows and shapes of the next one" (57). As Mr. Compson notices, Sutpen fails to understand that fate is working against him, setting up his destruction beyond his immediate knowledge, a fate that stems directly from his own actions in the past. As with all tragedy, fate and character are not easily separable. Sutpen creates his own fate, just as Oedipus does in Sophocles' prototypical tragedy. Despite the tragic figure's efforts to control his destiny, actions from his past reverberate in the present. In this respect, like Macbeth acting on the assurances of the witches, Sutpen believes he is affirming his existence, while his fate is secretly evolving to destroy it in the figure of Charles Bon.

Thomas Sutpen tells Mr. Compson that he was tricked into believing that he has conquered his fate, conquered negation. The qualities of this contest are displayed in his boyhood, his own rejection of his family's social standing,

after his rejection at the door of the Southern landowner, his experience in Haiti, and his eventual return to the South to make "his mansion rise . . . out of the swamp . . . the bearded white man and the twenty black ones and all stark naked beneath the croaching and pervading mud" (28). Sutpen is victorious in all of these endeavors, and each reveals his power to overcome the "croaching and pervading" forces of limitation that surround him. His actions reveal his strength, and his initial potency sharply demarcates him from the narrators who try to describe him. In the middle of the novel, Sutpen's beginnings are related directly to Quentin by his grandfather. It is significant that Faulkner allows Quentin to hear from the closest possible source Sutpen's own words in the account of Sutpen's beginnings, giving us the sharpest view possible of his indomitable will.

Thomas Sutpen goes through a process, similar to Macbeth's, beginning from a seemingly rational perspective that is slowly eroded until overcome by his monomaniacal drive for power. Sutpen's rejection at the door of the wealthy landowner shows him a view of himself that he wishes to reject, as Mr.

Compson notes:

[H]e seemed to kind of dissolve and part of him turn and rush back through the two years they had lived there like when you pass through a room fast and look at all the objects in it and you turn and go back through the room again and look at all the objects from the other side and you find out you had never seen them before, rushing back through those two years and seeing a dozen things that had happened and he hadn't seen them before. (186)

Sutpen sees his own degenerate condition. His voice is taken from him (he is not even allowed to give the message), and this confrontation, this symbolic limit to his existence, rankles the boy. He flees from the house, and in an ironic reversal of Plato's Myth of the Cave, he crawls "into the cave," sitting "with his

back against the upturned roots," in order to think (188): "[H]e was seeking among what little he had to call experience for something to measure it [his rejection] by, and he couldn't find anything" (188). Briefly, Sutpen ponders the limits to his own negation, and like Macbeth, he "knew that something would have to be done about it; he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life" (189). When he returns home late that night, Sutpen's rational musings are overcome by passion, similar to Macbeth's. While sleepless in his bed, Sutpen is tortured and overcome by his own despair:

all of a sudden it was not thinking, it was something shouting it almost loud enough for his sisters on the other pallet and his father in the bed with the two youngest and filling the room with alcohol and snoring, to hear too: *He never even give me a chance to say it. Not even to tell it, say it:* it too fast, too mixed up to be thinking, it all kind of shouting at him at once, boiling out and over him like the nigger laughing: *He never gave me a chance to say it and Pap never asked me if I told him or not and so he cant even know that Pap sent him any message and so whether he got it or not cant even matter, not even to Pap.* (192)

Sutpen sees his role in the world reduced to meaninglessness. The fact that it does not matter whether or not he had delivered the message comes to symbolize for him the ultimate futility and meaninglessness of his existence. He refuses to accept negation in these terms. So he concludes, " '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. You see?' and he said Yes again. He left that night" (192). Like Macbeth, Sutpen wishes to become that which limits his own existence. Macbeth wishes to become king, and Sutpen wishes to become a wealthy Southern landowner. Both believe that by overcoming and usurping the forces above them, they can conquer the qualities of negation within their own lives. And, interestingly enough, both

Macbeth and Sutpen make their first steps to conquer negation in the depths of the night.

Confronting darkness, ambiguity, and negation itself is central to Macbeth and Sutpen. Macbeth seeks out the witches, and Sutpen launches out into the dark West Indies, specifically Haiti,

a spot of earth which might have been created and set aside by Heaven itself, Grandfather said, as a theatre for violence and injustice and bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty, for the last despairing fury of all the pariah-interdict and all the doomed--a little island set in a smiling and fury-lurked and incredible indigo sea. (202)

Faulkner explicitly demonstrates the dark and inscrutable qualities of negation that Sutpen confronts in the West Indies. Faulkner uses language that brilliantly evokes the qualities of negation during the seige of the plantation, when "he [Sutpen] and the father fired at no enemy but at the Haitian night itself, lancing their little vain and puny flashes into the brooding and blood-weary and throbbing darkness" (204). But Sutpen refuses to be dominated. In his forging out from the house into the darkness, we are reminded of Macbeth's charge to Macdonwald:

[Sutpen] just put the musket down and had someone unbar the door and then bar it behind him, and walked out into the darkness and subdued them, maybe by yelling louder, maybe by standing, bearing more than they believed any bones and flesh could or should. . . ; maybe at last they themselves turning in horror and fleeing from the white arms and legs shaped like theirs and from which blood could be made to spurt and flow as it could from theirs and containing an indomitable spirit which should have come from the same primary fire which theirs came from but which could not have, could not possibly have. . . and then daylight came with no drums in it for the first time in eight days, and they emerged (probably the man and the daughter) and walked across the burned land with the bright sun shining down on it as if nothing had happened, walking now in what must have been an incredible and desolate solitude and peaceful quiet, and found him and

brought him to the house: and when he recovered he and the girl were engaged. (204-05)

Sutpen goes out into and conquers the darkness, and, importantly, is granted that with which he will attempt to conquer time itself, a woman. Like Macbeth, Sutpen believes that each "successful" step he takes will secure and fulfill his design, not recognizing that his "design" is doomed to failure. Sutpen believes that each action he takes will be "the be-all and the end-all," and we can associate Thomas Sutpen with Harold Bloom's conclusions about Macbeth: He is a victim of his own irrepressible will to live (Canon 463). Both Sutpen and Macbeth seem most bent on establishing their identities and potencies in the midst of darkness. Macbeth murders Duncan and Sutpen repulses the siege in the middle of the night, symbolically confronting and briefly conquering the forces of non-being.

Both Macbeth's and Sutpen's symbolic confrontations with negation transmute into the quest to foster dynasties. One of Macbeth's most glaring obsessions is to pass his throne down to his own progeny, and Sutpen demonstrates a similar drive. He cannot accept the taint of questionable blood into his design. And we come to realize that acquiring a position of social ascendancy is not the culmination of his desires. Briefly, it seemed that Sutpen's intentions were to acquire wealth in Haiti (the wife being an added bonus), in order to return to the South and build his estate, his Southern Garden of Eden. Like God, though, Sutpen wishes to create life that will inhabit his Edenic garden, a "pure" strain of life that will endure throughout time. Sutpen is satisfied not only with the acquisition of wealth, position, respectability, or any other social measure of value, but wishes instead to transcend time, to acquire a timeless lineage. David Minter accurately identifies these qualities: "Naming

his kingdom Sutpen's Hundred, he builds a magnificent mansion and surrounds it with formal gardens. In his desire to make himself a king and found a line of princes, he seeks not only to create something 'to represent his own blood, his own passion' but also to avenge an affront suffered in his boyhood" (William Faulkner 154). He wants to become immortal, "father to a line of kings" (Mac. 3.1.59), as reflected in his speculation on the timeless judgment of past and future generations: ". . . with all the dead ones waiting and watching to see if he was going to do it right, fix things right so that he would be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him when he would be one of the dead" (178). Sutpen's convoluted logic of existing in death to look into the faces of those of the future reflects his insatiable desire to pass beyond normal human existence, to apotheosize himself forever. The ultimate and shocking irony is that he pulls it off. He does live on into the lives of the future, but not as he had intended.

Both Macbeth and Sutpen believe they have a clear perspective on their environments, but they are both misled--Macbeth by the witches and Sutpen by Eulalia's father. Sutpen's initial problem, "the mistake" as he phrases it, occurs immediately on the heels of his initial success. His tragic belief that he has freed himself from the chains of his own contingency is clearly displayed after his success in Haiti: "beard body and intellect at that peak which all the different parts that make a man reach, where he can say *I did all that I set out to do and I could stop here if I wanted to and no man to chide me with sloth, not even myself*-- and maybe this the instant which Fate always picks out to blackjack you, only the peak feels so sound and stable that the beginning of the falling is hidden for a little while" (194). But, as he tells Quentin's grandfather thirty years

later, he did not have all the information. Reminiscent of the witches in Macbeth, ". . . they [Eulalia and her father] deliberately withheld from me the one fact which I have reason to know they were aware would have caused me to decline the entire matter, otherwise they would not have withheld it from me--a fact which I did not learn until after my son was born," namely that Eulalia and their son may have had black blood (212).

This information is crucial. Black blood, or the suspicion of it, becomes for Sutpen negation personified. He will spend the rest of his life trying to free himself from it, while struggling to establish a line of "pure white" descent. Black blood and patrilineage become opposite sides of the coin of Sutpen's negation. He believes that he can free himself from Eulalia and Charles Bon while establishing his new patriarchy in Jefferson. He possesses the belief in non-contingency shared by all tragic figures: "[Sutpen] knew that something would have to be done about it; he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life" (189).

But despite his efforts, Charles invades Sutpen's "design." And it is amazing how similar Sutpen's and Bon's stories are. Faulkner draws them as inverse reflections of each other:

. . . that [Sutpen] stood there at his own door, just as he had imagined, planned, designed, and sure enough and after fifty years the forlorn nameless and homeless lost child [represented in the present as Charles Bon] came to knock at it and no monkey-dressed nigger anywhere under the sun to come to the door and order the child away . . . he must have felt and heard the design--house, position, posterity and all--come down like it had been built out of smoke. . . (215)

Sutpen cannot miss the irony of Fate's bringing Charles to him as a macabre reflection of himself, Bon approaching the door at Sutpen's Hundred as he himself had approached the door of the rich Tidewater plantation owner when

he was a boy. Sutpen does not give up on his design, and strikingly like Macbeth in the murders of Banquo and Macduff's wife and children, he does not confront Charles directly but uses his son, Henry, to destroy him.

After it appears that he influences Henry enough to eliminate Bon, Sutpen reinitiates his quest to establish his lineage. Henry repudiates Sutpen and his material inheritance, so Sutpen needs to establish another heir. Judith is unacceptable to Sutpen, as Olga Vickery states: "Judith cannot give him the grandchildren he needs, and even if she were to do so, they would still be on the distaff side and hence a compromise with the Southern notion of male hierarchy and primogeniture" (96). So Sutpen seeks an heir elsewhere. He offends Rosa by suggesting "that they try it first and if it was a boy and lived, they would be married" (228). But his "shrewdness failed him again. It broke down, it vanished into that old impotent logic and morality which had betrayed him before . . . since it (the old logic, the old morality which had never yet failed to fail him) was already falling into pattern. . . ." (224). Rosa is irremediably insulted and abandons Sutpen to his design. So, Sutpen sleeps with Milly Jones, then rejects her because their child is a girl, a lineage progressing from the distaff being irreconcilable to Sutpen's design. Wash Jones, Milly's grandfather and Sutpen's greatest admirer, cannot abide Sutpen's rejection of Milly. Wash's use of the scythe to kill Sutpen is, of course, symbolic of Sutpen's final inability to escape Time, the Grim Reaper who brings Sutpen's tragic life to its end. Even though Sutpen is not quite the devil she imagines him to be, Rosa Coldfield's rhetoric, though enraged and passionate, is for the most part accurate:

Because he was not articulated in this world. He was a walking shadow. He was the light-blinded bat-like image of his own

torment cast by the fierce demoniac lantern up from beneath the earth's crust and hence in retrograde, reverse; from abysmal and chaotic dark to eternal and abysmal dark completing his descending . . . ellipsis, clinging, trying to cling with vain unsubstantial hands to what he hoped would hold him, save him, arrest him . . . to find severance (even if not rest and peace) at last in the stroke of a rusty scythe. (139)

As readers, we are horrified at and fascinated by Sutpen's tenacity. Like Macbeth, he refuses to relinquish control over events. After his initial rejection at the door of the wealthy plantation owner, Sutpen relentlessly pursues his design, believing to the last that he can conquer negation, time, race, and even his own "tainted" posterity. But while he fails to achieve what he set out to, he does live beyond his own death. He and his progeny haunt the minds of Southerners for generations. Thomas Sutpen becomes one of the voices "murmuring of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow beyond the immediate fury" (232). He demonstrates the South's doomed quest to close the door on its own past, the futile attempt to separate race from consciousness and influence, and, most powerfully, the inability to sever past from present. No matter how consuming our "immediate furies" may be, "all our yesterdays light the way" to tomorrow's "dusty death." Each generation contends with the forces of negation, as demonstrated by Henry, Judith, and Charles, and eventually, and most excruciatingly, in the consciousness of Quentin Compson.

Chapter Five: "Their Devil's Heritage"

Though Thomas Sutpen is the central reference point for all characters in the novel, the essential concept of Absalom, Absalom! is not his tragic demise, but rather the effect his tragedy has upon those who come into contact with him, either directly or indirectly. As Irving Howe writes, "Few things in Faulkner astonish more than Sutpen's power to make himself continuously felt, shading each scene, altering the lives of all who touch or cross him" (222). Henry's, Judith's, and Charles Bon's lives are destroyed by the influence of Thomas Sutpen. Rosa refers to him as "the evil's source and head," (12) and it is difficult to disagree with her. And while Thomas Sutpen is more closely aligned with Macbeth, Sutpen's children resemble the young people of Elsinore, desperately trying to exist in a world not of their own creation. They are literally condemned and haunted by the ghost of their father. In a macabre and fascinating construction, we have Southern equivalents to Laertes, Ophelia, and Hamlet, poisoned by Sutpen blood. Faulkner goes to great lengths to further complicate Sutpen's modern world. Through incest and miscegenation, Sutpen's children believe that "things rank and gross in nature" definitely possess their South, and they do their best to overcome the concomitant opposing forces they confront. But like Hamlet, Laertes, and Ophelia, they are doomed to defeat. Faulkner creates a world similar to Elsinore, where we can see the impact of a society overrun and haunted by the forces of negation. Parallels between the characters and forces of Shakespeare's Denmark and those of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha show the full influence of Shakespeare's tragic design upon Faulkner's. The Sutpen children struggling against tragic necessity illustrate the indomitable qualities of tragic contingency.

First, there are qualities of Laertes' and Hamlet's characters in both Henry and Charles. Henry serves as the protective brother, like Laertes, but also like Hamlet, he is pushed by his father into a situation he did not desire or create, where he is paralyzed by his inability to act until the last possible moment. Charles, on the other hand, seems to seek out his own revenge, like Laertes at the end of the play, but like Hamlet, he is a lover who arguably uses his loved one to push those forces surrounding him to act. Both Henry and Charles confront what they perceive to be the forces of negation around them, and both are destroyed in this confrontation. What makes the situation most ironic is that for each of them, the other becomes negation personified. Each character, however, is being influenced by a stronger force above him, namely Thomas Sutpen, a force whom neither can seem to ignore, repudiate, or escape.

Sutpen is a menacing influence upon his son Henry. Sutpen brings him down to the stables to watch the fights with the Negroes, but Henry is repulsed and sickened by the violence. According to Mr. Compson, it is an event that "Henry could not quite stand up to" (40). Ellen witnesses the scene:

. . . and the spectators falling back to permit her to see Henry plunge out from among the negroes who had been holding him, screaming and vomiting--not pausing, not even looking at the faces which shrank back away from her as she knelt in the stable filth to raise Henry and not looking at Henry either but up at *him* as he stood there with even his teeth showing beneath his beard now and another negro wiping the blood from the body with a tow sack.
(21)

In a more violent and twisted way, Faulkner gives us a representation of Hamlet's father's ghost immersed in an evil and inscrutable darkness, forcing his son to witness and acknowledge it. This early scene symbolizes Henry's

plight throughout the text. The fight in which his father is engaged will become Henry's own, wrestling psychologically with the black blood of Charles Bon.

Judith Sutpen, on the other hand, seems to have acquired some of her father's indomitable will. On the surface she appears to be stronger than Henry. She witnesses Sutpen's fight with the Negroes from above, suggesting that she will transcend the negation into which she was born. And in many ways she does. She sends Clytie to get Charles Etienne St. Valery Bon from New Orleans and does her best to raise him as her own child. She also cares for Charles Etienne's son, Jim Bond, when he has yellow fever, catching it herself and eventually dying from it. Despite these strengths, however, Judith is never able to free herself from the dominating male forces surrounding her. Like Ophelia, she succumbs to the will of the men around her, even to the point of repeating the same generational pattern of rejection: She makes Charles Etienne sleep midway between Clytie's pallet and her own bed, establishing his place within the Southern hierarchy of race. Olga Vickery elucidates, "Thus, in her relation with Etienne, Judith repeats almost exactly the action of her father in connection with Eulalia Bon. She too need only have closed her eyes to have 'fooled the rest of the world'; she too chooses to assert principle at whatever cost to her own and the boy's emotions" (99). Like Ophelia, Judith follows her father's wishes, sacrificing what she loves to his will and becoming an agent for Sutpen's design.

Though she is never driven into insanity and suicide (these will save themselves for future generations), she is limited, used, and eventually destroyed by the men surrounding her. Her attitude of resignation is presented

most clearly in her words to Quentin's grandmother when she delivers Bon's letter to her:

Because you make so little impression, you see. You get born and you try this and you dont know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they dont know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it cant matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it . . . (100-01)

Beneath Judith's words are feelings of futility, meaninglessness, and an incomprehensibility about existence. She has become, like Ophelia before her suicide, a woman unable to decipher cause and effect in the cursed world she has inherited. Mr. Compson identifies this quality as "that curious lack of economy between cause and effect which is always characteristic of fate when reduced to using human beings for tools, material" (94).

Of all Sutpen's children, Charles Bon is the most interesting because all of the major themes of the novel center literally in and around him. At times, he appears to be the fulcrum around which the entire novel pivots. Charles represents both the curse of the house of Sutpen and the curse of the South as a whole. Eric J. Sundquist believes "[t]he 'Flaw' in Thomas Sutpen's grand 'design' is, of course, his first son's supposed black blood" (100). Sundquist goes on to state that it is the "debacle of miscegenation, which the novel so continually engages as the curse and sin that brings Sutpen's design, like that

of the South itself, to collapse" (114). Frederick R. Karl also comments on Bon's dualistic role in the novel:

Race arises out of shadows, caves, labyrinths. It is part of Sutpen's past, and it brings Charles Bon into the family not only as future member but as the racial "other half." Yet the physical presence of Bon is not so important as is the textured shadow of the young man, the past as racial avatar. He is the forbidden, the tabooed object, the nasty myths turned into flesh; and his presence begins to dominate the novel less than one-quarter through, although we barely see him. His figure then hovers over the entire novel, which while it doesn't seem to be about him is, in actuality, almost always about him. (551)

Like Caddy in The Sound and the Fury, Bon becomes not only a character but an idea that dominates and affects each character's *Weltanschauung*. This invasive, dominant idea is, most specifically, the intrusion of black blood into the white consciousness, a consciousness unwilling to accept it. Bon is rejected first by Thomas Sutpen, then by Henry, and figuratively and posthumously by Judith in her treatment of his son. Charles Bon's tragedy centers around his desire to validate his existence within a system unwilling to accept it, indeed, "designed" to abnegate it.

It is Mr. Compson's belief (based upon inadequate information) that Sutpen tells Henry on Christmas Eve of 1860 (84) about Bon's octoroon mistress and child. Though Mr. Compson does not suspect Bon's possession of black blood, he constructs a psychologically compelling justification that Bon would offer Henry for his "marriage." Mr. Compson's speculation is lengthy, but it does cast light on the issue of racial syncretism through sexual intercourse, the fatal flaw Bon and the South have inherited, and Mr. Compson's speculation is consistent with what we discover of Bon's character throughout the text. He imagines how Bon would justify his marriage to his black mistress:

Not whores. And not whores because of us, the thousand. We--the thousand, the white men--made them, created and produced them; we even made the laws which declare that one eighth of a specified kind of blood shall outweigh seven eighths of another kind. I admit that. But that same white race would have made them slaves too, laborers, cooks, maybe even field hands, if it were not for this thousand, these few men like myself without principles or honor either, perhaps you will say. We cannot, perhaps we do not even want to, save all of them; perhaps the thousand we save are not one in a thousand. But we save that one. God may mark every sparrow, but we do not pretend to be God, you see. Perhaps we do not even want to be God, since no man would want but one of these sparrows. (91-92)

What Faulkner achieves in this passage is dizzying in its complexity. Bon, with Hamlet-like introspection, examines the problem of slavery, and his solution is to save one person. The fact that Bon would rank himself with those "without principles or honor" is significant in the fact that it represents the Southerner's fear of miscegenation, and it makes sense that Mr. Compson, rational representative of Southern ideology, would attribute these qualities to Bon. Hamlet's "special providence in the fall of a sparrow" rings with irony here because Bon casts himself as providence, though he says he does not "pretend to be God." He believes he can provide salvation for the blacks while redeeming the South for its sins. Bon is portrayed here as the saving son, yet the theology is hopelessly muddled, as we would expect in a tragedy. Bon is no Christ, and Sutpen is no Holy Father. And though Mr. Compson ascribes qualities of nobility to Bon, we never have any indications that Bon is actually noble. In fact, the picture we get of him is the most obfuscated of all the characters in the text, probably because he is the hardest for the various narrators to comprehend. And, of course, this makes sense. Faulkner's South is unable to deal with the complexities of miscegenation, so when the Southerners in the text are presented with a figure who willingly attempts to

legitimize not only miscegenation but interracial marriage as well, they are uncertain about what to make of him. Bon tragically violates the cultural mores of his environment, venturing out to confront the forbidden forces of negation, in this case miscegenation, just as Macbeth ventures out to the witches. Both defy cultural and conventional mores believing that they can survive the confrontation, and both are destroyed by forces representing the mores that have been violated: Macbeth is killed by the loyal Macduff, and Bon is killed by the "loyal," though desperately confused Henry.

But as we look more closely into Mr. Compson's speculations on Charles Bon, we begin to see qualities reminiscent of Hamlet. Bon elaborates upon the metaphysical qualities of the South, resembling Hamlet's tortured musings on the "stale, flat, and unprofitable" "garden gone to seed," where Hyperion is dead and the satyrs run the show:

And perhaps when God looks into one of these establishments like you saw tonight, He would not choose one of us to be God either, now that He is old. Though He must have been young once, surely He was young once, and surely someone who has existed as long as He has, who has looked at as much crude and promiscuous sinning without grace or restraint or decorum as He has had to, to contemplate at last, even though the instances are not one in a thousand thousand, the principles of honor, decorum and gentleness applied to perfectly normal human instinct which you Anglo-Saxons insist upon calling lust and in whose service you revert in sabbaticals to the primordial caverns, the fall from what you call grace fogged and clouded by Heaven-defying words of extenuation and explanation . . . Perhaps He does not even require of us that we save this one sparrow . . . But we do save that one, who but for us would have been sold to any brute who had the price . . . Yes: a sparrow which God Himself neglected to mark. Because though men, white men, created her, God did not stop it.

(92)

In Mr. Compson's speculations, Bon employs rhetoric reminiscent of Hamlet's, displaying a Hamlet-like disgust toward the evil in a world abandoned by God, yet who, with a Macbeth-like determination, wills to become God on earth.

It is a testament to Mr. Compson's narrative powers that he can "create" Bon as a character who seems to exude nobility of purpose while simultaneously challenging, and thus representing, the one evil the South cannot recognize--miscegenation. Eric J. Sundquist writes: "Mr. Compson's dwelling on the 'ceremony' between Bon and his 'wife' provides a significant context for the unraveling of Bon's tragedy eventually undertaken by Quentin and Shreve, for it is at the climax of his recapitulation of Bon's gradual exposure of Henry to the peculiar sexual conventions of New Orleans that the ultimate barrier of the novel is preliminarily revealed" (119). That barrier is the mixing of white and black blood, and because this mixture exists in Charles Bon (and it is this barrier that neither Henry nor Thomas Sutpen can get past), Sutpen refuses to acknowledge him. Not only does Charles insist on miscegenation, reflecting Macbeth's betrayal of the code of loyalty, but he has also inherited it--he is himself a representation of miscegenation. What makes Charles such an interesting character is that he reflects both Macbeth and Hamlet simultaneously, making him one of Faulkner's most complex manifestations of the material he absorbed from Shakespeare. "To be or not to be" for Charles is ineluctably bound with a recognition from his father that he so desperately desires. Peter Brooks writes,

Yet Bon appears as the hero of romance, with a simpler and more absolute design. He simply wants a sign--any sign--of recognition from his father. *"He would just have to write 'I am your father. Burn this' and I would do it."* Bon's insistence on marriage to Judith becomes the choice of scandal in order to force the admission of paternity. What appears to be erotic desire reveals

itself to be founded on the absolute demand for recognition by the father. (260)

Bon becomes an amalgamation of the separate tragic personalities of Hamlet and Macbeth. On one hand, Bon's drive to be recognized by his father parallels Hamlet's desire to fulfill the duty prescribed to him by his father in a convoluted and chaotic world. On the other hand, Bon's action, though not as frenzied and reckless as Macbeth's, has about it the same indefatigable urgency, the same refusal to succumb to the forces of negation surrounding him while confronting them directly and seemingly without hesitation.

The relationship of father to son that is so pervasive in Hamlet runs throughout Absalom, Absalom! The similarities and differences between Charles Bon and his father are striking. He arrives at the small college in Mississippi "a young man of a worldly elegance and assurance beyond his years, handsome, apparently wealthy" (58). His first emergence into the Sutpen arena could not be more antithetical to Thomas Sutpen's savage invasion of Jefferson. But, like his father, Bon "appeared almost phoenix-like, fullsprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time" (58). Also like Sutpen, Bon takes on, at least to Quentin and Shreve, a godlike omnipotence. Shreve imagines Bon thinking about Henry:

[W]hat cannot I do with this willing flesh and bone if I wish; this flesh and bone and spirit which stemmed from the same source that mine did . . . what could I not mold of this malleable and eager clay which that father himself could not--to what shape of what good there might, must, be in that blood. . . .(254)

Shreve's ideas about Bon hearken back to the biblical creation of man, illustrating Bon's desire not only to transcend his physical father but to shape Henry's destiny, becoming omnipotent and non-contingent. But, as mentioned

above, Bon's desire is not to forge an eternal dynasty; it has no quest for immortality at its core. He desires the recognition of his father, longing for

that flash, that instant of indisputable recognition between them and he would know for sure and forever--thinking maybe *That's all I want. He need not even acknowledge me; I will let him understand just as quickly that he need not do that, that I do not expect that, will not be hurt by that, just as he will let me know that quickly that I am his son.* . . . (255)

Because Sutpen refuses to "recognize" Bon, Bon tries to force his father to recognize him through the engagement to Judith. He refuses to allow the denial of his existence; he vies against the quality of non-being represented by Sutpen's rejection of him. As Hamlet uses Ophelia to get at Polonius (and in turn Claudius), Bon uses Judith to get at Sutpen.

Believing Bon to be his own negation personified, the "mistake" and racial impurity he must deny, Sutpen uses Henry to destroy Bon. Shreve asks incredulously,

"[T]hen the demon must turn square around and run not only the fiance out of the house and not only the son out of the house but so corrupt seduce and mesmerise the son that he (the son) should do the office of the outraged father's pistol-hand when fornication threatened: so that the demon should return from the war five years later and find accomplished and complete the situation he had been working for: son fled for good now with a noose behind him, daughter doomed to spinsterhood--and then almost before his foot was out of the stirrup he (the demon) set out and got himself engaged again in order to replace that progeny the hopes of which he had himself destroyed?"

"Yes," Quentin said. (146)

Sutpen becomes the source of Henry's destruction. As Hamlet's father's ghost pushes Hamlet from a position where he must hold his tongue (1.2.159) into a position where he must act, Sutpen pushes Henry from a stance of acceptance of Bon into a position where he must kill him. Sutpen appears wraithlike, spurring his son to action by giving him bits of information, until Henry

eventually learns everything. All choices are slowly stripped away from him, and it is amazingly ironic that the more information Henry gets about Bon, the fewer choices he has about killing him.

The "probation" during the Civil War, when both Bon and Henry hope that the war will resolve the conflict, demonstrates the paralysis of an embattled consciousness trying to come to terms with two divergent and opposing ideals. Faulkner's Civil War comes to represent, at least in this novel, the war of the divided American psyche trying to resolve the conflict of race played out in the destinies of two tragic figures. Before Sutpen tells Henry in the tent of Bon's black blood, Henry believes not only that Charles is his half-brother but that he has "married" a black woman, significant crimes to Henry who cannot then abide Bon's marriage to Judith. But, like Hamlet, Henry hopes that the forces of fate will resolve the conflict during the war. We discover that Henry was wounded and Bon finds him. Neither can compromise, though:

Bon that found Henry at last and stooped to pick him up and Henry fought back, struggled, saying, 'Let be! Let me die! I wont have to know it then' and Bon said, 'So you do want me to go back to her' and Henry lay there struggling and panting, . . . and Bon said, 'Say you do want me to go back to her. Maybe then I wont do it. Say it' and Henry lay there struggling . . . until Bon held his arms and lifted him onto his back. (275)

In an ingenious and ironic inversion of Hamlet's ultimate acknowledgment of death's dominion, "Let be" (5.2.220), Henry cannot accept Bon or compromise his own ideals. Henry is not allowed the luxury of inaction. He is pushed to the destruction of Bon both by his father and by Bon himself.

Towards the end of the war, Sutpen gives Henry the last and crucial information that he will need to eradicate the threat of Charles Bon. Quentin reflects upon Sutpen's meeting with Henry in the tent: Sutpen says, "*He must*

not marry her, Henry. His mother's father told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part negro" (283). Michael Millgate rightly asserts, "Because he has spoken to Henry Sutpen, Quentin possesses the vital piece of information, the fact that Charles Bon had Negro blood inherited from his mother" (164).

There is no other information Sutpen could have given Henry, and this is the last piece of information Henry requires. He will kill Bon if he attempts to reunite with his sister. He cannot abide the miscegenation. If Sutpen tells Henry anything else in the tent, all importance is drained from the meeting, as well as Quentin's meeting with Henry at the end of the novel. In fact, Quentin asserts that he gives his father this crucial piece of information. When Quentin is telling Shreve about Mr. Compson's commentary on Sutpen's repudiation of Eulalia and Charles due to their black blood, Shreve immediately interrupts, questioning Mr. Compson's new knowledge of Bon's black blood:

"Your father," Shreve said. "He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick, after having waited forty-five years. If he knew all this, what was his reason for telling you that the trouble between Henry and Bon was the octoroon woman?"

"He didn't know it then. Grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it."

"Then who did tell him?"

"I did." Quentin did not move, did not look up while Shreve watched him. "The day after we--after that night when we--"

"Oh," Shreve said. "After you and the old aunt. I see."

(214)

Faulkner explicitly states where and when Quentin received the information that Charles was part Negro. Quentin tells Shreve that he got this information from Henry on the night he and Miss Rosa went out to Sutpen's Hundred. Reading the book for the first time, we do not know yet that Quentin speaks to Henry. But,

if we recall this passage when we do read later about Quentin's meeting with Henry, we know part of what they discussed.*

After Henry meets with Sutpen in his tent, Bon recognizes the import of Sutpen's influence. He says to Henry the next day, "*So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear. Henry doesn't answer . . . He didn't need to tell you I am a nigger to stop me. He could have stopped me without that. Henry*" (285). Sutpen could have stopped Bon by acknowledging to Bon the fact of his paternity. And because Sutpen does not, Bon refuses to relent. Henry tries to placate Bon by declaring that Bon is his brother. Bon viciously replies, "*No I'm not. I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry*" (286). Henry cannot allow the miscegenation, so he kills Bon.

We might initially assume that Henry believes he has overcome negation. He has conquered the dark forces personified in Charles Bon. But Henry is destroyed by his actions. He has killed a part of himself. His life from then on is a doomed battle of futility. He becomes a living ghost, literally "death-in-life" (Millgate 164), who returns to Sutpen's Hundred to die, fittingly in Sutpen's disintegrating mansion, the decaying emblem of Sutpen's tragic design. Like Hamlet and Macbeth, neither Henry nor Charles fends off negation. Ironically, though Henry kills Charles' physical body, his spiritual presence haunts the rest of the text, and though Henry survives physically, spiritually he is dead, moving zombie-like to his eventual demise in the mansion of Sutpen's Hundred. Henry, Judith, and Charles remain the "accursed

* For a thorough discussion of Bon's Negro blood, see Cleanth Brooks' extensive commentary in The Yoknapatawpha Country, Baton Rouge: Louisiana SUP, 1963. 436-38.

children" who are destroyed by "their devil's heritage" passed to them from their father.

Chapter Six: "Nevermore of Peace": Quentin Compson's Inheritance in
Absalom, Absalom!

Of course, any reading of Absalom, Absalom! is incomplete without a discussion concerning the role of Shreve's and Quentin's "reconstruction" of the Sutpen story. Through Quentin's actions and his versions of the story, we recognize that Quentin, too, can be seen as a tragic consciousness attempting to conquer the negating forces of the Sutpen story in his own mind. In discussing the inherently "unknowable" facets of Thomas Sutpen's story, Michael Millgate states that "what we do know about him is his meaning for, and effect upon, Quentin, and as the action progresses Sutpen recedes from the foreground, allowing the weight of the novel's major concerns to be subtly shifted on to Quentin's shoulders" (153). Despite his engagement in the story, any information Shreve has about the Sutpen tragedy has been ineluctably filtered through Quentin's consciousness. No matter who is speaking, be it Rosa Coldfield, Mr. Compson, or Shreve McCannon, Quentin's becomes the filtering and collective consciousness. The narrative builds brick by brick through the text the Sutpen tragic past within Quentin's mind. He is perhaps the ultimate tragic figure of the novel, demonstrating most explicitly the effect of the tragic sense of life upon a single consciousness. Quentin's psychology from The Sound and the Fury resonates throughout Absalom, Absalom!, and in Absalom, Absalom! we recognize the tragic elaborations of Quentin's thought that the Sutpen story causes to evolve within his psyche. In Faulkner's development of Quentin in Absalom, Absalom!, we realize that Quentin represents, as Bon does, an amalgamation of the tragic qualities of Macbeth and Hamlet.

Myriad Faulkner critics have identified the connections between The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!. David Minter writes:

Yet Faulkner uses Quentin's maladies to enter and discover Sutpen's story, thus establishing intricate relations between Absalom, Absalom! and The Sound and the Fury. Through Quentin Compson we discover that several themes crucial to The Sound and the Fury are also crucial to Absalom, Absalom!-- particularly the themes of repetition and fate, self-involvement and incest. Yet, in addition to entering both novels, these themes inform the relations between them. (Faulkner 158)

John T. Irwin, in his thorough psychoanalytic analysis of the two texts, Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge, expresses a similar sentiment: "It is a mutual process in which what Quentin knows of the motivations in his own family life illuminates the story of the Sutpens' and, in turn, the events in the Sutpens' story help Quentin to understand his own experiences" (26-27).

Though one would question the quality of "understanding" Irwin suggests, one might agree that Quentin's and the Sutpens' stories are thematically reciprocal.

The most significant connection between the two novels is Quentin's confrontation with non-being, characterized by his impotence in The Sound and the Fury, and his inability to resolve the ambivalences within his own consciousness, demonstrated in Absalom, Absalom!. The story of Sutpen and his children resonate throughout Quentin's mind and serves as another example of how "all occasions do inform" against him. He is unable to escape his obsession with Southern ideology and, at the same time, is unable to accept it. We recall Hamlet's futile attempts to resolve the competing and divergent elements of his own consciousness with his father's command to avenge his death. Like the report of Hamlet's father's ghost, Sutpen's story represents the curse of the South that Quentin is doomed to confront and, arguably, by which

he is destroyed. Rosa's sentiments intuitively and symbolically apply to Quentin:

Yes, fatality and curse on the South and on our family as though because some ancestor of ours had elected to establish his descent in a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it, even if it had not rather been our family, our father's progenitors, who had incurred the curse long years before and had been coerced by Heaven into establishing itself in the land and the time already cursed. (14)

We can easily picture a slightly more open Quentin Compson relating similar sentiments regarding his own tortured consciousness to Shreve. Faulkner illustrates the effect of the dead South upon the young Southerner confronting the ambiguities of the twentieth century. At the beginning of Rosa's narrative, Faulkner draws our attention to the abnegating effects of the Southern past upon Quentin's present:

. . . two separate Quentins now--the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was--the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople and notlanguage. . . . (4-5)

In this passage Faulkner demonstrates the entire meaning of both texts, that Quentin is doomed to become one of the ghosts that have expressed their "darker purposes" to him. By the end of the novel, he cannot separate the two ambivalent halves of his consciousness, the one thinking of the future and the one influenced by the past. Contemplating the past, he recognizes the power of the ghosts throughout the novel. He muses upon his own reflections when his father took him to see the Sutpen tombstones: *"But you were not listening,*

because you know it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will and do" (172). The legacy of the violence of the South has inculcated Quentin's consciousness from the beginning. But in spite of Quentin's beliefs about absorption of the past, it is necessarily brought to him by others.

It is significant that, like Hamlet's father's ghost and Hamlet himself, Rosa wants Quentin to remember her story. She states, "So maybe you will enter the literary profession . . . and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it, " to which Quentin thinks, "*It's because she wants it told*" (5). We are reminded of Hamlet's father's ghost saying to young Hamlet, "I find thee apt. / And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed / That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf, / Wouldst thou not stir in this" (1.5.31-34). Rosa wants Quentin to remember the story so he can pass it on himself, rather than have it submerged in the underworld's river of forgetfulness. In light of the way Quentin takes his life by drowning himself in a river, this connection seems striking, as if Quentin is unconsciously trying to escape the pain of his remembrance, despite his conscious resolve to perpetuate that pain forever, and thereby give it meaning, as seen in the conclusion of his monologue in The Sound and the Fury.

Quentin finds connections to all aspects of the Sutpen history. In Thomas Sutpen he recognizes the indomitable will that he himself lacks, that "for Sutpen the source of real power is the force of the individual will" (Irwin 100). The ghost of Thomas Sutpen haunts Quentin's failure with his sister, his inability to challenge the forces threatening his own personal "design." Hamlet's words to his father's ghost echo in Quentin's situation: "Do you not come your tardy son

to chide, / That laps'd in time and passion, lets go by / Th' important acting of your dread command?" (3.4.107-109). Sutpen demonstrates a will that Quentin lacks, and a will that indicts his own impotence, so that Quentin can muse that maybe it took "*Thomas Sutpen to make all of us*" (210). Faulkner elaborates upon this point later when Quentin and Shreve are sitting back to back recounting the story:

--the two of them back to back as though at the last ditch, saying No to Quentin's Mississippi shade who in life had acted and reacted to the minimum of logic and morality, who dying had escaped it completely, who dead remained not only indifferent but impervious to it, somehow a thousand times more potent and alive. (225)

Quentin's "Mississippi shade" continues to haunt his consciousness, potent and alive, despite the fact that the room in Cambridge is the only place where Quentin can recount the story and confront the ghosts of Sutpen and his children because "it would be [there] above any other place that [the story] could do the least amount of harm" (225). But Quentin cannot escape the harm. It has become a part of his neurotic psyche, contributing to his "nevermore of peace" (298). But there are, of course, other factors complicating Quentin's conscious mind. Clearly, the triangle between Henry, Judith, and Bon affect Quentin much more deeply and destructively than Sutpen's individual story.

Henry's actions indict Quentin's impotence with an inescapable directness. The Henry--Judith--Bon triangle mirrors almost completely the Quentin--Caddy--Ames triangle. Obviously, Henry protects Judith's honor while Quentin fails to protect Caddy's. But the situation is more complicated. John T. Irwin elaborates upon Quentin's psychology in relation to Henry and Charles: "Quentin projects onto the characters of Bon and Henry opposing elements in his own personality--Bon represents Quentin's unconsciously motivated desire

for his sister Candace, while Henry represents the conscious repression or punishment of that desire" (28). Irwin continues, "In the doubling between Bon and Henry, Bon plays the role of the shadow--the dark self that is made to bear the consciously unacceptable desires repudiated by the bright half of the mind" (30). Irwin goes on to suggest that Quentin splits his own "good-bad self into two separate people," Henry and Charles (29). In them Quentin sees the two conflicting forces of his psyche personified. As Sutpen sees the forces opposed and dangerous to his design in Charles, Quentin sees in Bon the forces opposed and dangerous to his Southern ideal of pure, untainted female virginity. Considering Quentin's inability to conquer the forces of negation that he sees externally (Dalton Ames and Caddy's other lovers) and internally (his own incestuous desires), Quentin is logically and deeply disturbed by Henry's murder of Charles Bon.

But Quentin is unable to keep himself away from the Sutpen story. He has the tragic will to know, as both Hamlet and Macbeth do. Quentin's mind is philosophically active, though he solipsistically focuses upon the story that so directly mirrors his own. When he accompanies Miss Rosa out to the house, he must have knowledge of what is in the house, destructive though the knowledge may be. He says, " 'But I must see too now. I will have to. Maybe I shall be sorry tomorrow, but I must see' " (296). The fact that Quentin is sorry "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" is made clear in Faulkner's technique of mirroring Quentin's reflections in bed about his meeting with Henry. Sleepless at Cambridge, Quentin remembers being home, sleepless in bed, after talking to Henry, who, importantly, was also in bed:

. . . then he [Quentin] was lying on the bed, naked, swabbing his body steadily with the discarded shirt, sweating still, panting: so

that when, his eye-muscles aching and straining into the darkness and the almost dried shirt still clutched in his hand, he said 'I have been asleep' it was all the same, there was no difference: waking or sleeping he walked down that upper hall between the scaling walls and beneath the cracked ceiling, toward the faint light which fell outward from the last door and paused there, saying 'No. No' and then 'Only I must. I have to' and went in, entered the bare stale room whose shutters were closed too, where a second lamp burned dimly on a crude table; waking or sleeping it was the same: the bed, the yellow sheets and pillow, the wasted yellow face with closed, almost transparent eyelids on the pillow, the wasted hands crossed on the breast as if he were already a corpse; waking or sleeping it was the same and would be the same forever as long as he lived. (298)

It is significant that Quentin remembers himself straining to see in the darkness, that he is struggling to make sense of and come to peace with the confrontation with Henry. And it is significant that waking or sleeping the image is ineffaceable, like Lady Macbeth sleepwalking in torture over the "damned spot," or like Macbeth, who "hath murder'd sleep," proclaiming, "No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red" (5.1.33; 2.2.41, 60-61). Quentin and the Macbeths are unable to escape the consequences of their actions. Quentin cannot forget the tomblike room where he confronts Henry, and to reinforce this point, Faulkner presents Quentin's recollections of Henry's ghostlike decay while Quentin is in bed wrestling with his own spiritual demise. Quentin becomes an ironic repetition of Henry in the present. The Southern ideology that Henry represents is what emotionally kills Quentin, ironically dooming him to the same unfortunate end as Henry, a spiritless and meaningless existence. We might associate the dimly burning lamp with all Quentin's yesterdays that, for him, "light the way to dusty death." The past, especially his confrontation with Henry, is, for Quentin, the candle he

is unable to blow out, reducing him to a "walking shadow" whose actions are essentially meaningless.

As a result, Quentin is doomed to continue re-telling the story, echoing in macabre fashion Hamlet's request that Horatio live to tell his "cause aright / To the unsatisfied" (5.2.344-45). R. Rio-Jelliffe eloquently elucidates this idea:

Quentin's dual past-present nature oscillates in what proves to be fatal disjunction. His life pattern reenacts the creative process and fictional circle, from passive reception of Sutpen's fatal design to active re-creation of it in story and in his life. From hearing (as it was with Sutpen), Quentin creates a "design" out of the fragments of the Sutpen story, then lives a distorted echo of Sutpen in his own self-doomed life. In action, Quentin like Sutpen, gains both revelation and destruction. (78)

One might hesitate to label Quentin's drive to reconstruct and tell the story as a form of "action," but rather a detached form of exploration of his own consciousness reminiscent of Hamlet. By examining and re-examining the Sutpen story, Quentin can in some way deal with the issues plaguing his own consciousness, explicitly his relationship with his sister in light of Southern ideology.

And what he comes to understand, consciously or not, is that his Southern ideology is insufficient. Like Hamlet, Quentin finds himself in a no-win situation not of his own construction. His consuming desire to have been able to act with the indomitable will of a Thomas Sutpen, or the irrepressible resolve of Henry Sutpen, becomes inadequate, as revealed in his confrontation with Henry in 1909. David Paul Ragan expresses this idea perfectly:

[Quentin's] meeting with Henry Sutpen denies the affirmation Quentin has associated with his act, suggesting that the family honor for which he has killed (and which to Quentin is all important) had been as hollow and empty as the honor of the defeated South. The action affirms nothing but a sterile principle and effectively wastes the lives of all the Sutpen children.

Quentin, then, is not paralyzed by his confrontation with a relic of the past in the present, but by a living symbol of the futility of the abstractions which he has exalted. His confrontation with Henry reveals to Quentin the final outcome of his own obsessions. Far from being a confirmation of significance, a reward for the defense of honor, Quentin discovers a wasted man whose life has finally stood for nothing. His father's nihilism lies personified before him, and he cannot bring himself to face its relevance to his own situation. (348)

In essence, the ideas for which Quentin has suffered regarding Caddy and Compson honor are rendered insignificant, proving Mr. Compson's claim that nothing is "particularly important to the dark diceman" (The Sound and the Fury 178). All the ghosts of the South that have haunted Quentin's consciousness, Thomas Sutpen, Henry and Judith Sutpen, Charles Bon, and even Quentin's own father, have demonstrated to him his own inability to conquer the forces of negation that surround him in the physical and phenomenal world. The Sutpen story reinforces Quentin's decision to kill himself, so that he can prolong the misery he feels and conquer time by perpetuating his misery beyond death, to exist in an undying afterlife of grief, where he can become like Prometheus, who declines when the gods offer to free him from his chains, declaring, "I am my suffering." Quentin's resolution becomes a macabre amalgamation of Hamlet's recognition of man's inability to conquer negation in the phenomenal world and Macbeth's determination to ultimately become negation by leaving it.

Conclusion

The comprehensive paradigm of the Shakespearean tragic protagonist can be seen in Faulkner's tragic heroes. Viewed in light of the qualities of Shakespeare's influence, Faulkner's characters become fuller manifestations within the evolving tradition of the tragic protagonist. Though Faulkner's characters confront bewildering manifestations of burgeoning twentieth-century ambivalence, they possess and augment the universal qualities of humanity's doomed struggle to confront negation and its own inherent limitations. While Quentin and Jason undoubtedly demonstrate specific conflicts in the early twentieth-century American South, the source of those conflicts resides much deeper within human consciousness. Each character's pain and failure reside in the attempt to escape man's constrained and limited potency, a quality recognizable in all tragic figures. Indeed, the Sutpen family illustrates the same futile endeavor to transcend man's mortal nature.

The specific conflicts that Faulkner's tragic protagonists have with and within their cultural environments reflect an elementary characteristic of Shakespeare's explorations into the tragic. We are inclined to agree with Harold Bloom's affirmation that "[p]ersonality, in our sense, is a Shakespearean invention, and is not only Shakespeare's greatest originality but also the authentic cause of his perpetual pervasiveness" (Shakespeare 4). Shakespeare's plays offer insights into the individual human consciousness wrestling with itself, and the central focus of that conflict is ineluctably the individual's role within the world around him. How Hamlet and Macbeth comment upon and interact with their respective worlds shows their grandeur as well as their affirmative representation of human aspiration. Furthermore, the

greatest component of Shakespeare's tragic protagonist is the dynamic phenomenon of the tragic hero himself observing his own thoughts and actions within his world, and though often convoluted but always complex, the psychological confrontation with negation becomes the central conflict within all of Shakespeare's tragic heroes.

An essential part of the Shakespearean tragic figure's self-awareness is revealed in the protagonist's confrontation with non-being. While Hamlet realizes the pervasiveness of non-being in the phenomenal world, and while Macbeth fights off this realization for as long as possible, it is at the core of both of their conflicts. And each believes that he should be able to conquer the very forces of negation that are limiting what he sees as his own fulfillment in the world. Though each character is flawed in unique ways, Shakespeare's tragic protagonists express the universal message behind all tragedies, namely that man confronts negation at every turn, and he affirms the grandeur of human aspiration in his belief that he can overcome the forces of non-being. This belief leads the tragic figure into a contest that he is doomed to lose, yet paradoxically, we admire him in his destruction.

Faulkner's characters resonate as Modernist variations on these Shakespearean themes. When we recognize this influence, we understand better that the core of Faulkner's commentary is not restricted to Southern sensibilities and post-bellum provincialism but rather encompasses the "human heart in conflict with itself," and in the case of his tragic heroes, the mind in conflict with its own mortality. In The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner presents the individual mind and psyche directly confronting the convoluted and often neurotic patterns of its own thought, and the underlying conflicts, often

unconscious, illuminate each character's fear of non-being. Hamlet's tortured soliloquies and Macbeth's ruthless acts recur in Quentin's self-destructive consciousness and Jason's immoral manipulation of everyone around him, Modernist reactions to humanity's perennial refusal to accept its own finitude. Faulkner more fully explores the tragic figure's attempt to forge his own identity free of surrounding forces in Absalom, Absalom! Like Macbeth, Thomas Sutpen refuses to relent in his quest for power and paternity, and like Hamlet, Sutpen's children struggle "to be" in a cursed world not of their own making. The tragic sense of life overshadows all characters in the novel, and despite their best efforts, none of the children can escape the tragic influence of Thomas Sutpen's monomaniacal history.

As the wealth of Faulkner criticism continues to grow, many scholars are choosing to focus on more specific readings of Faulkner's novels, often attempting to connect theme and character present in his work to Faulkner's own biography and his interaction with his own cultural surroundings. Though these approaches are unquestionably valuable, they risk losing the broader implications of Faulkner's art. Perhaps more than any other writer of the twentieth century, Faulkner added to the development of tragic literature. We can locate Faulkner's greatness in the evolution of the tragic paradigm when we recognize how Faulknerian tragedy bridges the gap between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His characters struggle in a world where old values have proved useless and no new values have arisen in order to facilitate the individual's progress through the wasteland of modern America. Yet, though the specifics of the struggle have changed, the essential and universal struggle remains unchanged. Like Shakespeare's heroes, Faulkner's protagonists enter

into the contest with negation in attempts to overcome prevalent forces of non-being believing that they can emerge victorious. In addition, the self-awareness of the tragic hero, viewing himself (with varying degrees of accuracy) in his struggle, is a central aspect of the tragic figure for both Shakespeare and Faulkner.

Reading Faulkner with Shakespeare's tragic paradigm in mind affords us a view of Faulkner's enduring universality. As Michael Millgate concludes, to read Faulkner from a strictly Southern, post-bellum perspective is to mistake "means for ends. . . . The solidity of Faulkner's provinciality provides the unshakable foundation for his immensely ambitious exploration of the fundamental human themes with which he is always primarily concerned" (292). Faulkner's texts exemplify his own individual talent within the ever-evolving tradition of tragedy, and on each reading of them we interact with Shakespeare as well as Faulkner, all of us "talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage" across time and place (Faulkner, Absalom 5).

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