Let My People Go: The Hebrew Bible, Freedom and Oppression in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying, Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*

Lauren Greenberg
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Professor Takayoshi
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Introduction

Art is a valuable tool to find new insight into ideas that one tends to accept at face value, such as those presented in Biblical stories. William Faulkner, in his fiction, relies on Biblical narratives to frame his own work while imbuing the familiar and widely accepted Biblical stories with a new perspective or possible meaning. As his dense prose can sometimes obscure the boundaries that he dismantles or the foundations he destabilizes in his writing, I would like to take a moment to elucidate what Faulkner achieves in his writing by examining how this breakdown and re-imagining of Biblical stories can occur though visual art. The myriad emotions that the Biblical characters could have been experiencing but are suppressed or simply not addressed in the text suddenly emerge the instant a viewer takes in a piece of artwork. For example, Adriaen van der Werff, in his painting "Sarah Presenting Hagar to Abraham," employs Biblical art as an avenue to explore other possible viewpoints on Biblical stories. His artwork introduces questions such as: Is the scene in which Abraham sleeps with Hagar consensual, or is it rape? How much younger is Hagar than Abraham? Is Hagar scared? Is Sarah envious? Or in another often-repainted image, the scene where Abraham kicks out Hagar – is he forced to do so by Sarah or is he enjoying his moment of power, and acting of his own accord as well? Is Sarah triumphant or remorseful? Which of these emotions does Abraham experience? Through his novels, Faulkner presents adaptations of Biblical scenes and stories that encourage readers to question the surface reading of the Biblical text.

In his novels *As I Lay Dying, Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner invites his audience to examine both the Biblical stories to which they refer as well as the existing structures and moral frameworks that society retains from the Bible. Faulkner employs *As I Lay Dying* to scrutinize the traditional interpretations of the lives of Job and Jacob as well as the perception of faith prevalent in the South, *Absalom, Absalom!* to reinterpret the story of David, Absalom, Amnon and Tamar, and *Go Down, Moses* to envision an alternate reality for Isaac.

By contrasting *As I Lay Dying, Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* with the Biblical stories upon which they are founded, the thesis will identify and parse the messages transmitted by each, and the values that each urges its readers to adopt, embody, or practice. This thesis aims to enable readers to better grasp each text in light of the other.

Existing Scholarship

Prior scholarship on the topic of Faulkner and its direct and implicit relationship to Biblical characters and themes exists, and I have drawn upon this body of work. Herbert A. Perluck, in his essay "'The Bear': An Unromantic Reading," discusses ideas of shame, chosen-ness, and endurance in "The Bear," through the character of Ike McCaslin. Philip C. Rule, in his essay "The Old Testament Vision in *As I Lay Dying*," explores Old Testament themes throughout the novel, focusing particularly on the link between Job and Addie, elaborating on the experiences of isolation and futility in their endeavors experienced by both Job many of the characters in the novel. Edwin M Eigner, in his essay "Faulkner's Isaac and the American Ishmael" points to a tradition of

American writing that portrays the protagonist as a wandering outcast, forging his own tradition in the wilderness, and attempts to place Isaac McCaslin in this type he has created. Most recently, Scott T. Chancellor, in his published dissertation "William Faulkner's Hebrew Bible: Empire and the Myth of Origins," compares Faulkner's understanding of time, the themes in his novels, and the traits and motivations of his characters to the established tradition of Jewish Biblical scholarship. He finds the common ground of traditionally Jewish approaches and interpretations of the Bible and of messianic time (where the present contains within it the weight and actions of the past), as well as the milieus of U.S. and Biblical imperialism and nation building. He notes the caution and the work that both texts include as both work to shape readers into nations that will influence and pass down heritable traditions to their descendants.

This scholarship, however, predominantly focuses on individual novels, and in doing so fails to bring together overarching themes of fatherhood and legacy, and freedom and oppression as they seep from well-known Biblical narratives into Faulkner's fiction. These ideas permeate and unite the two bodies of literature in a way that I have attempted to start exploring, but have by no means exhausted.

Relevance

My project aims to facilitate further interpretation of the Bible and dialogue about how the concepts expand to modern times, a facet of understanding the Bible and its themes and messages. Modern readers still attempt to bring the spirit of the each of these texts into their everyday lives, as major ideas from both have not been rendered obsolete:

the progress that Faulkner demands, as well as threads of morality and empathy that emerge in parts of the Bible or that audiences read into and subsequently back out of the text have yet to be implemented or fully incorporated into society.

Just as Chancellor explains Faulkner's Jewish view of time as one in which the past is collapsed into the present moment, so too can we see this in our own present, which then includes both the Bible and its messages, as well as the guilt, shame and hope embodied in Faulkner's depiction of the South. The Bible and Faulkner's novels, as well as the people and ideas that they influenced and propagated, inform the current moment, and thus how we understand and unpack what they mean, what their influence is, how they impact each other, and how they can impact us and help us to see the work that still needs to be done and further influence our own development. Viewing Faulkner's novels and the Bible in light of each other provides a new point of intersection of the past, present and future by adding another layer to a text that already rests upon a writing from the past.

Scope

This paper will examine characters, allusions and themes in *As I Lay Dying, Absalom, Absalom!, and Go Down, Moses*, respectively. As this reflects the chronology in which the novels were written, the paper investigates the progression of Faulkner's thinking in the decade between the publication of *As I Lay Dying* and *Go Down, Moses*. Faulkner moves from a focus on inner development and oppression experienced and internalized from interactions mainly with one's family but peripherally with the community, to a larger critique about social structures and expectations, and the ways in

which they oppress everyone living under or adjacent to them on all levels, from personal to societal. This paper will focus on character development and plot progression and details rather than the specific historical moment in which each text existed or their direct impacts in the time periods in which they were written.

In his novels *As I Lay Dying, Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses,* William Faulkner explores the limitations on freedom and the structures and relationships that oppress his characters. He focuses on the existing oppressive culture and social hierarchical structure in the South, as well as the barriers to language and communication that result from them. Characters such as Addie Bundren and Quentin Compson struggle with these concepts as they move through their lives and into their deaths, enslaved by Southern social conventions and expectations.

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As I Lay Dying provides the basis for the first chapter, in which I will examine similarities, differences, and allusions to Job and Jacob in the novel to unveil the failures of language and the chasms between characters, as well the ways Faulkner employs these references to align readers' sympathies and expectations with specific characters and actions.

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The second chapter, devoted to *Absalom, Absalom!* and its relationship to the Davidic cycle, investigates overarching themes of internal and external shame, hubris, and recognition, as they pertain to issues of race, class and, peripherally, segregation.

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In *Go Down, Moses*, race emerges at the forefront. It permeates the novel, complicating the quest on both the reader and the characters' parts to construct a genealogy. Within this endeavor, readers try to navigate questions of who has and who deserves ownership of land or legacy, and what it means to give these up. Understanding the implications and significance of these references will be explored through mining the references to the defining stories of the Old Testament (and the Jewish tradition) – Isaac, Ishmael, and Abraham, Joseph, and Moses.

Chapter 1

The Hebrew Bible in *As I Lay Dying*: Job and Jacob's legacies

William Faulkner said of his novel *As I Lay Dying* that he "took this family [the Bundrens] and subjected them to the two greatest catastrophes which man can suffer – flood and fire" (Blotner 249). He grounds his novel in diametrically opposed forces of destruction, though Biblical allusions that demonstrate immense devastation as well as illumination. The implied frame of the Biblical-scale destruction of the world keeps the larger picture present as each character delves into his or her own struggles with identity and how to relate to his or her family and the rest of the world. Philip C. Rule, in his essay "The Old Testament Vision in As I Lay Dying," notes that in this novel, "above all, there is the brooding Old Testament spirit of despair, hope, endurance—tensions as old as mankind—with which man faces the darkness and mystery of the world around him" (Barth, 107). Biblical allusions, on both explicit and implicit levels, extend to Faulkner's characters as well. There is a theory in creative writing that action creates character, but in I would argue that in *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner relies on Biblical allusions to shape his own and his readers' understandings of his characters. The inertia of his characters contrasted with their reliance on Biblical references to try to define their persona in relation to those around them serves to illuminate their traits and their interactions. In particular, parallels to the Biblical characters of Job and Jacob reveal overarching tensions, questions, messages, and most importantly, characters in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying.*

The Bundrens' journey is particularly reminiscent of the story of Job, who struggles intensely with the ideas of reward and punishment and whether upholding

values and believing in God is worthwhile. This intrinsic questioning of existing structures allows Faulkner's every sentence to reflect those ideas and to critique the constricting and desensitized approach to language that his society takes. It also provides a center beyond Addie to which all of the perspectives and narrators can relate and refer back to in different ways.

Death

On both a simple and a more in-depth level, Faulkner's adaptation of the themes of Job is appropriate to his novel. Rule asserts that Faulkner's message "is the Old Testament message of Job: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return'" (Job 1:21; Barth, 115). In this verse Job suggests there is a futility to life in that there is no physical manifestation of his accomplishments; no marked change, success or progress. Job is expected, from a religious perspective, to end up at the same place he begins – with faith in God. This idea of cycling back can also be applied to Addie, and can provide insight into where she believes she started. Addie demonstrates this idea of returning to where she began through repeating her father's aphorism, "The reason for living is to get ready to stay dead for a long time" (169). Thus what one returns to, and therefore where one originates from, is the ground. For Addie, the possibility of redemption, a raising oneself through transcendence, is denied before it even enters her consciousness. Addie's section begins with a reference to the past, immediately leading into this saying of her father's. Though the past includes her students, arguably the agents of change for the future, the possibility that they will effect positive change is immediately closed off by Addie's insistence on death rather than life. Right after her

second and most precocious child is born, rather that exult in this new life, she reverts to her thoughts of death. Addie "asked Anse to take me back to Jefferson when I died" (173). For Addie life and death are inextricably linked, and her death is her triumph. Carolyn Norman Slaughter, in "As I Lay Dying: Demise of Vision," explains,

> Living in her terms is evil in the terms of her culture, too: Mississippi Bible-belt terms which counsel to suffer the little children, not to relish whipping them; to honor father and mother, not to hate the father for 'planting' one; to submit to the husband, not to deny unequivocally his significance; to bring up a child in the way he should go, not to reject him (Darl), not to worship him (Jewel); not to commit adultery; not to refuse to confess or repent; not, above all, stubbornly to choose one's own terms. In Addie's culture, natural instinct is fallen nature; desire is concupiscence; will is willfulness; initiative is disobedience; independence is pride. (Slaughter)

The idea that living from Addie's standpoint is "not, above all, stubbornly to choose one's own terms," is present in her worldview from the start, when she adopts her father's adage to define her place in the world rather than creating her own. Addie, like Job, sees herself as stuck in a world where the terms of her life, including the societally accepted and agreed-upon definitions of good and evil; the expectation that reward and punishment correspond with the virtues of good and evil; and the fact that they do not necessarily correlate, are defined for her and therefore are things to which she resigns herself. From her vantage point beyond life, her struggle should be over, yet it is not. Her pent-up rage, still in existence, spills out onto the pages of her chapter. Job's struggle is in progress, taking him through a variety of emotion phases. Addie is an exacerbated, projected vision of the phase of his anger and confusion. Job, though, is on a journey to reach a grand conclusion, while Addie ended her personal growth at a place that for Job is merely a stop along the way. Viewing their differences through this lens can offer

insight into why she can only speak from beyond her death, surrounded by voices that suppress her and everything she believes in. Because living according to her convictions is "evil in the terms of her culture," Addie cannot move past her frustration. Her culture only views the "evil," but Faulkner understands and portrays her as not objectively entirely good or bad, but rather suffering from feeling repressed and isolated, without an outlet for her emotions except through violence against her students. Just as Addie's position represents an integral step along Job's personal journey, the reader can understand her position in the novel as an equally vital step along the audience's journey through the novel. Addie belongs at the center of the novel, expressing the frustration that her family experiences but cannot decipher.

The Failure of Language

Death permeates Addie's segment of the novel. On a practical level she is removed from life, speaking from after her death, yet a more in-depth approach reveals a reflection of this detachment in her life as well, as portrayed through the aloof attitude she maintained during her life. Fairly early on in her marriage Addie declares Anse dead to her even though he is still living and actively asserting herself. Furthermore, what she wants but will not allow herself to ask for is a "not-Anse" – a negation of his life (174). This is her suffering, that she endures life in all its forms as she awaits her death. While Job also suffers in his life, he does it because he chooses life and wants and believes that he will be saved from his suffering and uplifted out of his misery. Unlike Addie, who has already decided that there is no purpose to life beyond death, Job will not accept that and thus does not heed his wife's urging that he, "curse God, and die!" (2:9). Job instead

clings onto his integrity and potential, thereby upholding the system that Addie decries. For Addie, though, to adopt Job's attitude would have the opposite effect; it would undermine her dignity and her message. Believing in a religion that has been established to have no substance or credibility in her town, as Cora in particular demonstrates, would detract from Addie's intensity and her place of separateness in the novel. Recognizing part of the source of Addie's isolation as her lack of faith – in God, religion, and humanity – underscores the necessity of Job's faith as his way of accessing these same concepts of God, religion, and humanity and drawing them into his story. Without Job's faith they would not exist as entities at all, yet for Addie, were she to have faith, they also would not exist in the same way: they would be meaningless by not displaying that they ever held meaning that society devalued through acting and speaking disingenuously.

Though in one sense Job does champion God's glory and undermine the adversary, the way that this is often embellished upon and oversimplified in religion far exaggerates his devotion to God. The story of Job and its interpretation display a difference between perceived Christian values and the actual message of the text. Under a simplistic Christian interpretation, "the victory is seen in Job's confession of unshakable trust: 'God gave, Good took away. Blessed be God's name,'" (Pope, LXXIV). A closer reading of the text, however, reveals the tensions that Job experiences and the difficulty he has reconciling God's actions to his understanding of the world. Hope elaborates, "The prologue reflects a rather detached and impersonal attitude toward the cruel experiment to test the basis of Job's piety; by contrast the Dialogue is highly charged with emotion and the anguish of a tortured soul" (Pope, XXIV). Faulkner's society in Yoknapatawpha County similarly demonstrates a surface adherence to Christian values

that is not reflected in its actions. One can also view Anse and Addie's positions and narratives in the novel in the context of being authentic or disingenuous. Anse, detached from Addie's suffering, enacts a series of trials upon her, even in her death. In contrast to Anse's distance from and inability to attempt human connection, Addie's chapter is saturated with visceral and emotional responses to the world around her and the injustices of her life. She describes whipping her students, and says that, "when the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran," (170). For Addie this moment of intense violence is when she comes alive in her narrative, it is when she is most connected to others, as she explains, "living was terrible… only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream," (171-2). These parallels illustrate the schism between Addie's paradigm and Anse's understanding of the world. They also underscore the variegated ways in which one party's benefit or achievement is dependent on someone else's suffering.

This idea is further highlighted in the radically different mindsets of the Job of the Dialogue and that of the Epilogue; as Hope explains, "the Epilogue betrays no awareness that the doctrine of retribution had been refuted or even questioned" (Pope, XXIV). Anse similarly overwrites the history of the rest of the novel in the end by, directly after unloading himself of the burden of burying Addie, instructing his family to "Meet Mrs. Bundren," (261). This injustice is equal to that which God inflicts upon Job, in that both strip their victims of their places in society, whether metaphorically or physically.

Another interpretation of the ending, however, is that Job's faith is not fully sustained. This is based on understanding different translations of the specific diction, displaying that language has similar problems of being lost in translation in Job, and then

further lost in the interpretations that people want to ascribe to the text. Here, under one reading, Job says to God, "I know that you can do all things." But the Hebrew תעדי which appears in the text and has been interpreted as and translated into the first person past tense can also be read as the second person, thus making the line "you know you can do all things" (Job 42:2). The latter reading suggests that Job retains an underlying bitterness towards God. Soon after, he also says, "I recant and relent being but dust and ashes" but these words can also be translated differently to mean, "I shudder with sorrow for mortal clay" (Job 42:6; Miles, 319-25), implying that Job is withholding from God, and does not have full faith or unadulterated admiration for God any longer. In this way, Satan succeeds. Similarly, Addie's foe Anse also wins out in the end. Recognizing the ambiguity in Job and the idea of withholding can be applied here as well. Perhaps the fact that Darl, the only one who truly understands, is not there to witness his victory could be part of the withholding: Anse cannot "win" without having others there to witness his success, just as God cannot defeat Satan unless Job has free will.

Throughout, Job disagrees with God's treatment of him. As a result of arbitrary injustice, an indignant and bewildered Job expresses a wish to "argue his case with God, but he cannot find God nor force him to grant a fair hearing" (Pope, LXXV). Job laments, "no arbiter is between us to lay his hand on us both" (Job 9:33). Addie, in a similar position to Job as one who is subjected to unfair trials, also cannot speak or act out against the injustices being done for her as her coffin is carted from town to town emitting a vile stench and attracting buzzards along with unfavorable attention. Not only is she devoid of agency since she is dead and thus there is no one who can listen (not to mention that most would not care to), for Addie more importantly, the means of

communication itself – language – are insufficient. She explains that she "learned that words are no god; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at" (171). This, even more than the fact that no one is able to communicate effectively with her, is what the parallel to Job highlights. It is the absence of a means by which to ensure a dialogue that is vital to her isolation. Even while she was alive, the only one who understood her, and as he did not empathize with her and role as a mother, he could not fully understand her frustration, is Darl. Where Job appeals for a mediator, prosecutor, or witness and cannot find one and Addie refuses to reach out. While some retroactively read Job's pleas for an arbiter as a cry for Christ (Pope, LXXV), Addie does not seek redemption. This contrast between Addie and Job illuminates a key facet of how Addie functions to convey Faulkner's purpose. Whereas Job struggles to understand his situation for himself, Addie is resigned to her fate, to the death that has already befallen her – instead it is Faulkner's audience who need to understand the frustrating realities in which she lives and that cause rifts between people and isolate them from their fellow men.

Impossibility of Redemption

Though Addie refuses to seek out a redeemer, Darl attempts to take up this role as he tries to redeem her from the spectacle that is the Bundrens' journey. Although in some ways one could argue that Darl does sacrifice himself in his attempt to redeem Addie in that he is deemed insane and taken away, he is neither free from sin nor interested in redeeming all of mankind, and thus cannot stand up to Pope's concept of a Christ figure as self-sacrificing, selfless, and connected to a larger deity or cause. Darl's sacrifice,

rather than redeeming the world achieves nothing, and his maniacal laughter and last words of “Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes,” evinces his understanding of that fact (254). Thus as an arbiter or a redeemer, Darl fails in the novel but succeeds in communicating Faulkner’s understanding of himself and of Addie to readers. Though the other characters in the novel, such as the police, misread Addie entirely, the audience does not. The writer’s perspective is the one that the audience appreciates and takes away. Faulkner’s intent, once uncovered, also directs the reader back to the ambiguity of Job’s story. Instead of merely the characters within the text being unable to empathize with his viewpoint, his readers and their religious interpretations have overtaken his narrative as well, in many instances stripping it of the thought-provoking questions inspired by its ambiguity. Faulkner wants to stimulate reflection on the existing society through his depictions of Yoknapatawpha County, and the Job story in its original, when specific meanings and religious ideologies are not superimposed onto it, has the potential to perform a similar function, by motivating readers to evaluate their relationship with God and with their friends and families.

Darl’s actions reflect a belief that Addie does not deserve to suffer, and that instead her service in life should be honored. The idea of inverting the expected system of rewarding good behavior and punishing that which is immoral occurs in Job as well as through the juxtaposition of Anse and Addie. Addie suffered for her family through the “violation of her aloneness” via the children with which Anse provides her (172), while Anse profits off of the sacrifices of his family: while he talks to neighbors and “rubs his hands on his knees,” Cash is “a-hammering and sawing” to make Addie’s coffin (30); though Jewel dedicates his life to his horse, Anse takes it and sells it without asking;

while Dewey Dell's money is not hers, is for a specific purpose, and he claims, "I wouldn't take it, my own born daughter that has et my food for seventeen years, begrudges me the loan of ten dollars" (256) he takes it anyway; and when a marshal in a town along their way advises that Cash be taken to a doctor because the cement will "cause him to lose his leg," Anse responds that he reckons "he's all right" and allows for this prediction to come true (204). Anse imposes his will, ignoring everyone else's needs, so that he can sustain his vanity with new teeth and a new wife. In this way, Addie and her children continue to suffer and are not rewarded, while Anse behaves in a way that is contrary to any established moral code and is rewarded. It is Addie who is deserving of sympathy, yet it is Anse who lives, prospers, and dominates while Addie must lie passive in her coffin, devoid of any agency or ability to challenge him. Furthermore, Anse constantly fails to honor his word. Though he tells Dewey Dell that he "wouldn't take it," he then proceeds to acquire her ten dollars (256). His disregard for language further extends to his marital vows, another contract that he violates despite previous agreement.

Like the vows, which, though generally written out, are not stated in the novel, some of the language upon which Faulkner relies to convey irony and his messages about the failures of language is that which is implied or unspoken. A variety of characters state, "the Lord Giveth," and leave off the end of the verse in reference to mourning, whether superficially or earnestly, Addie's death. In these instances the reader is expected to infer the second half of "the lord taketh away." By using Job's quote, which both his characters and his readers can mentally complete, Faulkner achieves an ironic effect by only writing the first half of this verse. He highlights the ways that to his characters it seems as though God solely taketh away, and does not give at all. Or, if he does give, he

does not offer gifts that the characters are happy to receive or that improve their quality of life. Another instance of irony is accomplished through referencing Job when Anse holds himself up as a comparison to Job as the ultimate representation of an innocent man arbitrarily and undeservedly suffering. Anse's words serve to lead the reader to understand that Addie is the one who has and continues to suffer at the hands of Anse while he merely complains.

In another incarnation of this allusion to Job and to God giving and taking away, when Moseley the pharmacist is interacting with Dewey Dell, he tells her, "The Lord gave you what you have, even if He did use the devil to do it; you let Him take it away from you," (203). This time the full verse is said, but what the Lord gave is something that Dewey Dell is actively attempting to reject – a child. This line takes the reader back to Addie since that is where it has previously always been applied, and points back to her suffering. The parallels between Dewey Dell's desire for an abortion and Addie's attitude are striking: the fact that she is pregnant and the child will be born into a culture lacking in compassion and meaning reinforces Addie's juxtaposition of children and death in her own narrative. Rather than viewing this child as a bastion of hope for progress in the future and upon which to fuse language and meaning, Dewey Dell does everything within her power to prevent the child from living. In the end her efforts are futile though, and Faulkner's cycle will continue into the next generation.

The attempt of Addie's neighbors, as well as Job's friends, to convince her to repent exemplifies another futile endeavor. Hope asserts that in the "Dialogue" portion of the narrative, "Job effectively demolishes the friends' doctrine that wickedness is always punished and virtue always rewarded," (Pope, LXXVIII). Rule explicates the parallel

between Addie's neighbors and Jobs friends, writing, "like Job, Addie is surrounded by her friends—people who talk much of sin and suffering and salvation; yet their hearts are unexperienced, untried," (Barth, 114). Moreover, they also do not understand her and thus try to force their own values upon her. Job's friends urge him to "Think now, what innocent man ever perished? Where have the upright been destroyed?" (4:7). They suggest that he "seek God and supplicate the Almighty" such that God will relent and protect Job (8:5). Essentially, they express the belief that all this is happening to him because he must have sinned, and therefore he should repent. They come to these conclusions based on their values and experience with the world. Job, however, denounces his friends' opinions to help "save" him, instead claiming his innocence. Addie similarly rejects Cora Tull's efforts to help her achieve salvation because she too feels that Cora Tull cannot and will not comprehend her inner struggle. Moreover, though Cora Tull is a proponent of religion and religious doctrine from her rhetoric to her judgment of others, her actions do not back up her words. Addie explains, "sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words" (165-6).

The Question of Faith

This relates to a question that arises from Job's suffering, namely, "how can a man put his faith in such a One who is the Slayer of all?" (Hope, LXXXII). For Faulkner, this parallels a central question brought to light in *As I Lay Dying* by the Bundrens' exodus: if so many abuse and disrespect Language - even her name is not able to signify her own identity as in the end Anse attributes an alternate meaning to it by

bringing in a new Mrs. Bundren - in what can man put his faith at all? An answer to this lies outside the realm of language, and yet is precisely how the reader and Faulkner's characters can return to language. Examining the concept of Salvation, the ultimate religious goal of Faulkner's society, provides insight into Faulkner's ideas about how to live. Salvation, as we can infer from Addie, can be attained by one for whom both sin and redemption are not just words – by one who lives through action, and whose action gives words meaning. Anse's words, actions, and thus life as a whole, is meaningless. He is of no account to Addie, as she asserts that her aloneness "had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights;" he goes against his word with Dewey Dell, and he cannot appreciate the value of a wife enough to truly mourn for the original one he lost (172).

Though there appears to be an abundance of Mrs. Bundrens available to Anse, Regina Schwartz's concept of scarcity is pervasive throughout *As I Lay Dying*. The fact that Anse can only triumph as a direct result of the suffering of every other character conveys that there is a limit on the amount of happiness, wealth, and fortune that can exist in Faulkner's society. Though their class status could dictate this on its own, the fact that there is no transcendence in the end, that only Anse is happy and that it is tangible possessions that can be purchased that allow him to achieve fulfillment suggests that the scarcity is a function of more than a societal income disparity. Understanding this scarcity proves, for Faulkner's characters, to be precisely the key to success. As Anse, truly aware that the resources in his presence are finite, capitalizes on this knowledge to claim all of them for himself. Through this knowledge and his willingness to succeed at the expense of others, Anse is able to fulfill all of his desires. Insufficiently

assertive, Jewel and Dewey Dell are relegated to suffering. While in the Bible God does not necessarily favor the modern ideal of an ethical person – for instance Cain lives and he killed his brother, and Jacob prospers despite stealing his brother's blessing and tricking his father, among other examples – but rather he bestows his favor on people who are intelligent, and take initiative and responsibility for their own destinies. In the case of the Bible, authors' favorites are evinced through rewards and prosperity, whereas in *As I Lay Dying*, Addie, the one who suffers without eventually acquiring riches or status, is the one whom Faulkner favors. This contrast illuminates another possible interpretation of what qualifies as success in *As I Lay Dying*. Perhaps Addie is less concerned with the fortune of others and with connection than she might first appear. Though the journey to bury her brings her family together, by the end they are once again torn apart, with Darl physically manifesting this by having been forcibly removed from the rest of the Bundrens. Moreover, Addie's mission of finding her eternal resting place next to her father has been achieved. Similar to Anse, this has occurred at the expense of her family members' well being. Had she not required them to bring her corpse to Jefferson, her children's possessions might not have been taken or their health damaged.

The central journey of the novel relies on Addie's request that she be buried next to her father, which is modeled off of Jacob's bones taken back to the Promised Land when the Jews leave Egypt. He dictates "I am to be gathered to my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite" (Genesis 49:29). The parallels to Addie do not end there. Their major similarity is in the value that they place on words. Just as Addie reveres words, Jacob displays a distinct respect for them, despite his lack of deference to certain people or societal expectations. This resemblance enables

one to examine Jacob's priorities within the frame of language. Regardless of whether or not words help Jacob or set him back, he always works within the system that words create. He relies on their having worth and meaning as well. Jacob's actions of exhorting his brother to sell him his birthright and later stealing his blessing display his belief in the significance of words – by agreeing to in what these words transmit, imbues them with meaning. He does not ignore the power that the blessing bestows; instead he conveys how highly he esteems it by going against ethics in order to obtain it for himself. Moreover, the fact that the blessing cannot be rescinded and only one son can have the blessing, as Jacob explains to a distraught Esau who hoped his father would be able to bless him in the same way, "your brother came with guile and took away your blessing," further highlights the significance of words (Genesis 28:35).

While promises that are spoken cannot be retracted, unspoken rules are frequently flaunted in the Bible. Many characters fail to adhere to conventions, such as the concept of the firstborn being the chosen son. God chooses the younger sons as his favorite and as the recipient of his blessings multiple times, from elevating Isaac over Ishmael, to Jacob over Esau, to Joseph over his brothers. By making the unspoken assumptions flexible, the rigidity of spoken words and promises are upheld and endowed with greater worth through this contrast. Reverend Whitfield, while mulling on whether to confess his and Addie's infidelity, compares himself to Jacob when he asks, "have I not wrestled thigh to thigh with Satan myself?" (178). Whitfield later elaborates after hearing Addie is dying he confesses to God, thus he emerges from this "wrestling" with Satan victorious. In alluding to Jacob wrestling with the Angel of God, Whitfield equates his struggle with that of Jacob's. Not only are they of vastly different magnitudes due to the

possible repercussions, which are large for Jacob and could be non-existent for Whitfield, he omits the fact that it is possible to interpret this scene in the text in various ways, not all of which involve Jacob winning the fight. It is ambiguous, but in neglecting that fact in favor of a simple and palatable explanation, he begins to reveal his character as shallow and lacking depth. Following his train of thought though, Jacob is deemed victorious because he survives and gets a "blessing" (Genesis 32). In the case of the Bible, these words – the blessing – serve to validate Jacob's actions. To characterize Whitfield, Faulkner has him employ the same technique as when Anse compares himself to Job: ironic Biblical allusion. These self-drawn parallels expose Addie's suffering rather than the speaker's. Here, Whitfield does not understand the purpose of the struggle to re-emerge anew and ready to face the difficulties of the past, which for Jacob, include seeing his brother again for the first time. Whitfield instead rationalizes away the need to stand up to his past, instead remaining silent and unchanged. The juxtaposition between Jacob's transformation and Whitfield's evasion of responsibility displays Faulkner's caution against relying on words without action, and the damages to which this leads. Reverend Whitfield views confession, a mere a statement of words, as enough to absolve him of sin. Moreover, he further devalues the words he intends to confess by choosing Anse as his confidant, rather than first consulting Addie. He thereby disrespects Addie by going against her wishes and exacerbating her struggle. It is not he who must take care of the child or suffer; the responsibility for both falls to Addie. Darl explains, "she would be sitting in the dark by Jewel where he was asleep. And I knew that she was hating herself for that deceit and hating Jewel because she had to love him so that she had to act the deceit," (131). In viewing words as sufficient to purify his soul, he makes himself the

arbiter of his destiny and deems the situation not worthy of saying anything in the end once he discovers that Addie has died. In ascribing a power generally reserved to God to himself, he additionally takes on the power to interpret God's will, which is how he explains not needing to confess at all anymore. Thus by disrespecting Addie's promise to never expose their secret and her likely wishes that he not, as well as his initial flicker of conscience that leads him to want to be honest with the world, he becomes a character that the audience cannot respect or, ironically, as he is a reverend, place their faith in.

For Faulkner, faith then becomes what the reader makes of it, and does not solely accord with or reside in those whom society dictates that it should. Addie's experiences with alienation by the very tool that is expected to connect people, language, further demonstrate Faulkner's plea to the audience to reimagine the function and capacity of language, faith, and other concepts that have become meaningless or lost relevance. Taken in light of the possibility of understanding, which Darl displays even if his contemporaries cannot see it, spark hope that readers can imbue these lofty ideals with new meaning so that they regain their power to liberate, connect, and redeem the people who live under their influence.

Chapter 2:

Recognition and Repeating Cycles in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Many of the themes present in the novel of *Absalom, Absalom!* were inspired by and reflective of events in Faulkner's own life. He watched, experienced, and partook in the creation and passing on of his own family legacy, most notably through his writing. Though Faulkner idealized his grandfather, "he would see the total figure clearly, and he would perceive its arrogance and fatal haughty pride. The great-grandfather would give his descendant priceless material for his work, and he in turn would confer upon his ancestor a kind of immortality" (Blotner, 28). On a different level, as a descendent of the Southern aristocracy he felt the tension with those who he deemed "rednecks," or the rising new wealthy class. Though there was disdain for the rednecks from those born into old money for being vulgar, ambitious, and pushy, he acknowledges the immense energy these individuals possess, and that this quality will propel them into gaining even more power in the future (Blotner). Beyond the connections to Mississippi politics, even further insight can be gleaned from the implicit and explicit allusions to the books of Samuel and the contrast between protagonists King David and Thomas Sutpen. In order to understand where and how Faulkner differs from and draws upon the Biblical tradition, it is necessary to examine both Sutpen's design and King David's history and his moment in the narrative progression. The Biblical paradigm was one saturated with warnings for the impending future as well; just as the rise of the nouveau riche was the beginning of the death toll of the overwhelming stronghold that the Southern aristocracy held over the South, the institution of kingship in the books of Samuel is regarded by some prophets as a step toward the dissolution of the Israelites' relationship with God as they know it.

Though Faulkner dreads the moment when these two classes clash, he sees greater problems with Southern society than the internal fight among the wealthy that will surface along with the rednecks' ascent to prominence. For Faulkner, all of this is expressed through Sutpen's goals and his failures, as Sutpen is emblematic of the amoral rednecks and individuals achieving power through new money.

Sutpen's Character

Dirk Kuyk Jr., in *Sutpen's Design* presents Sutpen as motivated by a desire to create social change. His reading, though overly generous toward Sutpen's character, addresses the heart of Sutpen's desire to make a statement about class relations. He writes, "Sutpen meant his design to teach society the lesson that those lucky enough to have risen above brutehood should at least care about the feelings of the unlucky" (Kuyk, 21). He wanted to do this by creating his own dynasty – via amassing wealth, power, slaves, and status in the social hierarchy – so that when a boy comes to knock on his door he will take him in and be able to "shut the door himself forever behind him on all that he had ever known," (210). Similar to the way that the South relies on the Bible as a founding myth upon which values are built, Thomas Sutpen's experiences as a child (being turned away from the door or a mansion by a slave) serve the same purpose for him in elucidating for him how society operates (socially and socio-economically). His design, then, is the founding myth of his dynasty. Kyuk elaborates, "Sutpen intends to free the stranger's descendants from brutehood forever and, by doing so, to strike at the heart of the patriarchal structure on which not only the southern plantation but also Western culture itself had been based" (Kyuk, 21). According to Kyuk, Sutpen wants to

complete a staggeringly generous public act of selfless kindness, but the boy who arrives at the door, ready to fulfill his design, becomes his downfall.

Kyuk ignores the fact that even though Sutpen has a vision for a less divisive class structure, he accrues his wealth and builds his dynasty by relying on slavery and the subjugation of blacks, which he does not include in what he sees as his great struggle for equality. His plan fails because it is corrupt at its core by his attitude toward blacks and slavery. Sutpen is entirely unaware of this though, as he says to General Compson about his design and his understanding that it will never develop in the way he wanted, "the question is, Where did I make the mistake in it, what did I do or misdo in it, whom or what injure by it to the extent which this would indicate." (212). I would posit that Faulkner's answers, which Sutpen is never given, are that he failed before he even began because he relied on slavery, and that he injured everyone affected by the legacy of slavery in enacting his design. For Kyuk, however, the main reason Sutpen's design does not succeed revolves around the repeated image of the boy at the door: it is because the boy who comes to his door is his son. That his mother is an octoroon woman complicates the issue, but it is Bon's connection to Sutpen and his reappearance, rather than the foundation upon which Sutpen builds his dynasty, around which Kyuk centers his argument. Because Charles is his son, despite the fact that he and Sutpen are estranged, the magnanimity of Sutpen's action of taking him in and closing the door behind him is vastly diminished as it could be seen as serving Sutpen's own interests. Bon's blackness plays a role, but it is secondary to that of his position as Sutpen's child. His black blood simply further disqualifies him from helping Sutpen attain the acknowledgement from society's elite that his plan requires, as to them helping a black child would be so

completely useless and irrelevant as to delegitimize his action and his status entirely. Obsessed with his experience as a child, Sutpen desperately wants to leverage wealth and status as weapon against high society to shame the rest of elite society into noticing his magnanimity.

In this way, both Sutpen's intent and the failure of his plan are encompassed in Faulkner's social criticism: he cannot succeed because the South needs to undergo a paradigm shift – it is not enough to only treat one's fellow white men with compassion; the institution of slavery, its legacy, and societal treatment of blacks are too corruptive a force for one man to make a dent in the pervasive inequalities. For Faulkner's point to be made, then, it makes sense that Sutpen's design also fails in part because Charles Bon is part black. Though Sutpen hated the classist system upon which the South operated and foresaw the "day when the South would realize that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage" he prefaces this with the statement that he does not want to be present for it and to witness the violence that will descend on the South, and thereby on himself as a part of it as well (209). As a man born into, a product of, and entrenched in the South and its classist, racist paradigm, Sutpen aims to change the system from within, explaining, "to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what he did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with" (192). More than a vision for social change, this design is also Sutpen's vision for revenge, as conveyed by his use of violent language such as the word "combat." Moreover, caught up in the various ends that his plan will achieve, Sutpen does not recognize that utilizing the morally bankrupt system to achieve his ends will

itself undermine him. Moreover, he cannot recognize this, as he does not simply rely on slavery as an existing structure, he actively engages in subjugating his slaves. After making them engage in demeaning, savage physical fights with each other, "perhaps as a matter of sheer deadly forethought toward the retention of supremacy, domination, he would enter the ring with one of the negroes himself" (21). More than a peripheral part of life, slavery and oppression of blacks is an integral part of Sutpen's life and self-aggrandizement, which renders him racist and unable to succeed, thereby exposing Faulkner's critique of both the classist and racist systems that structured life in the South.

Faulkner's critique of slavery and its remnants as well as the dynastic structure of South parallels the way kingship is presented in Bible. Both governing systems are viewed as detrimental to overall well-being of the people, in terms of freedom, equality, and quality of life in the South in Faulkner, and service of God and to some extent greater quality of life as well in the Bible, and both arguing for a flat rather than hierarchical structure, whereby one person or, in the case of Faulkner, group of people (wealthy white landowners) are not raised up above all of the rest. For Faulkner, though, this structure is merely a symptom of systematic oppression of blacks and lower-class individuals. Faulkner uses Sutpen's design to attack the dynastic structure in existence in the South, as well as the explicit reference, through the title, to a king emblematic of the time period in the Bible where kings and kingship as moral and necessary rulers or concepts are being questioned and indicted to investigate and unveil the need for equality in the South.

King David's Social Location

In addition to the overarching theme of kingship in which the Absalom story takes place, the specifics of the character of King David and the story of Absalom present parallels and contrasts to the novel that generate further insights. In the books of Samuel, though kings were coming to power and it was an era of monarchic rule, there was a persistent undercurrent of foreboding, a lurking idea that kings were potentially much more a more dangerous force than a positive influence on the people, that they would contribute to the further deterioration of the people's relationship with God.

Nevertheless, David was chosen by God and revealed to Samuel, who functioned as the kingmaker in addition to being a prophet. David acquired a reputation and rumors circulated that he would surpass Saul in greatness. He gained great acclaim when he fought the giant Goliath and chopped off his head with Goliath's own sword.

The story of David and Goliath reflects Thomas Sutpen's own rise to power in that he too has a rags-to-riches story, whereby he accumulated wealth in the West Indies and tamed "wild" men that he brought back as his slaves. Bringing about the most blatant parallel between the two stories, David later marries Michal, Saul's daughter – the daughter of the man who is both his father figure and his adversary. He also proceeds to have relations with various women as well, and one woman provides him with Absalom and Tamar, while with another he creates Amnon, their half brother. Amnon lusts after Tamar, his half sister, and possesses her, only to then be "filled with intense revulsion" and to cast her out immediately afterward despite her pleas that he marry her, claiming that his leaving her "is worse than anything else you have done to me" (2 Samuel 13:15-16). She grieves her lost virginity and honor by following the customs by throwing "ashes over her head, [tearing] the robe that was wearing," sobbing as she leaves (2

Samuel 13:19). As part of his surge to usurp his father's power, Absalom avenges her honor by killing his half brother Amnon after David makes it clear that he will not reprimand Amnon. Absalom ultimately dies at the hands of King David's army/servants (2 Samuel 18:15), leaving David to grieve over him, as he wept, "Would that I had died instead of you, Absalom my son, my son" (2 Samuel 18:33). Here he exhibits his intense love for his son, despite Absalom's shortcomings and despite the fact that he had caused him so much pain. David similarly earlier evinced his love for his other son, as he "would not hurt Amnon because he was his eldest son and he loved him" (2 Samuel 13:21). This, then, is one of the key differences between Sutpen and King David: that of pride and love. Though both characters want to believe that humanity can triumph, Sutpen's failure and lament stems from pride rather than love, as Faulkner explains in a letter to his friend Hal Smith in August 1934, that *Absalom, Absalom!* was "the story of a man who wanted a son through pride, and got too many of them and they destroyed him" (Blotner, 334).

Recognition

For David and his sons, sex became a way to attain power, or to send a message to a figure of authority, whether their father or, as in David's case, Saul, about their disregard for his power. This phenomenon of triangulated desire, or wanting something through someone else, is played out in the Bible through Michal. For Sutpen, a similar phenomenon takes place through Ellen Coldfield. He explains that the building of his dynasty, through which society would recognize him as powerful and important and he would thereby be able to achieve his design, required "money, a house, a plantation,

slaves, a family—incidentally of course, a wife" (212). Once the reader recognizes Sutpen's choice of wife as a way to achieve something greater, it is easy to transpose this onto Charles Bon as well, and see history repeating itself with the son following in the exact path of his father. For Charles Bon, the ultimate goal of being recognized by Sutpen perhaps led to his courtship of Judith. Though he knew it was incestuous, he was looking for any way through which his father might acknowledge him. Shreve speculates that Henry expects something from Sutpen, such as a note. He imagines that Bon thinks "maybe he will write it then. He would just have to write 'I am your father. Burn this' and I would do it. Or if not that, a sheet of scrap paper with the one word 'Charles' in his hand," or perhaps he would interfere with his correspondence with Judith, anything such that even if he will not be acknowledged as Sutpen's son, "at least I shall have forced him to admit that I am" (261). Here is another point at which the allusion to the Biblical story then becomes relevant: the plot and the reader's investment in it hinges on reader's belief that Bon is, in fact, Sutpen's son, which the title from the start makes it abundantly clear to be the case. Despite the fact that Sutpen had never seen or known him as a grown man and they never discuss the situation, it must be believed by both parties that Charles Bon is Sutpen's son.

Faulkner also relies on the Bible to underscore the weight that recognition holds in his novel. A persistent theme in the Bible, recognition is relevant throughout the founding stories in the text. From Jacob's moment of recognition with Joseph's coat, to Joseph's moment of clarity when Joseph's brothers come down to Egypt, to God's insistence that Pharaoh recognize his power, to Judah's admission of wrongdoing upon seeing Tamar with his signet ring, to Saul recognizing the piece of cloak that David cut,

the importance of recognition in the establishment of authority cannot be overlooked. These moments all depend on one man recognizing that someone else exists in relation to him, and that this relationship is significant to both parties in some way. Both Sutpen and Charles are denied this moment of recognition, and thus devote time and energy to striving for it, despite the fact that the desired outcome is unlikely at best. From the pivotal moment when Sutpen "went up to that door for that nigger to tell me never to come to the front door again," he wanted the wealthy, privileged white men who were essentially governing society to recognize him as a worthwhile, dignified human being (192). Wounded from that ordeal, Sutpen now wants "them" – the upper class who shut him out – to recognize his benevolence and how shockingly different his behavior is from theirs. The irony here is that his whole design is to prevent someone else from having his experience, but in trying to uphold his plan he refuses his own son this very same acceptance, and thus passes on exactly what he aimed to challenge.

When David is unable to bring his vision to fruition, he adopts a new role, that of a prophet. Faulkner does not grant Sutpen the privilege of occupying this role – Sutpen is killed before this can happen, and moreover, one could easily imagine that his brutality to his constituents – his family and his slaves – would disqualify him from holding a position inspiring utmost reverence and respect. Instead, in *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner himself is the prophet, foreshadowing the struggle for civil rights still to play out in the South, as a result of the oppressive legacy of slavery and the existing dynastic social structure, through his depiction of the past being consumed in the present through the fire that is set in front of Quentin and Rosa and that devours Henry and Clytie.

Another major difference between the two father figures, according to Donald M. Kartiganer, is that this acknowledgement also requires an allowance for the son to attempt to challenge the father, as a rite of passage and as a necessity for the health of the dynasty that he is building. Kartiganer asserts that Sutpen's "repudiation of Charles" is "the key to Sutpen's later decline and destruction" (Duvall, 27). Whereas David outlined the correct path by being willing to confront and pass on power to eldest son, Sutpen's refusal to engage with his son, to recognize him and give him the ability to try to overtake him is his undoing. Kartiganer explains, "while the god lives and thrives the land remains prosperous; but when he fails to honor the code of succession, when he cannot say "son" to the product of his body, then the godhead and the land are corrupted, and the tribe, or the section, or the nation trembles at its base, crumbles in fire and violence" (Duvall, 25). The demise of Sutpen's dynasty's demise, as well as, metaphorically, that of the South, matches this warning: Sutpen's Hundred burns down, and Quentin self-destructs. Taking this one step further, Sutpen's main reservation about acknowledging Bon is his blackness. Incest is not the issue here the way it is in the Biblical text, race is. Since he repudiated he wife immediately upon finding out her status as an octoroon, presumably before his son was even born, and before he even began building his dynasty, his view of race is confirmed through this lens as a corruptive force that destroys the foundation of his design before he even starts constructing it.

The Oppressive Stronghold of Shame and Sin

A central tenet of both stories is that Tamar and Judith both consider themselves to be left widows without having ever been married. For Tamar this makes sense, as

Talmudic law dictates that there are three ways to acquire a woman, through money, a contract, or sexual intercourse (Scherman, Mishnah Kiddushin, Seder Nashim). For Judith, despite the glaring lack of concrete evidence that they were ever engaged, Henry is introduced as "the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride" (7). In the Biblical story, however, Tamar's defilement becomes a public spectacle as Tamar leaves Amnon's house "screaming loudly," though her brother tells her to "keep quite about it" (2 Samuel 13:19-20). In *Absalom, Absalom!* Henry does not require this warning, as Judith's plight and sadness is not based around dignity, since neither of them knows that Charles is her half brother. Thus rather than Judith and Henry becoming the centers of this event, the significance is placed on Sutpen and his internal shame, as he is the only one who knows. In both instances shame is felt, but in the novel it is through an internal other. This difference between the two versions can provide insight to Faulkner's critique of the dynastic structure of the South: Sutpen's design cannot succeed because to allow one person to criticize the mentality of the rich based on his own experience as a white male, though he is of a lower class, ignores the glaring problems of the treatment of blacks as well as the immensely pervasive magnitude of the inequality. Faulkner's message is more than that the dynastic structure is inherently wrong: the entire way by which it came to be, via slavery, is morally reprehensible as well. Sutpen's unwillingness to grant Bon the dignity afforded by recognition demonstrates that it is not just a public spectacle that deems these systems immoral, they are intrinsically corrosive and problematic. Thus Sutpen knows that despite what the outside world might know or could think, if he recognizes Charles Bon his plan is ruined. Furthermore, Quentin's

internal shame is a model for this as well. It eats at him from the inside, until he eventually decides that his only way out is through death.

Henry represents another form of entrapment. Unlike Absalom, who is forced to flee after killing his brother and then later returns to overtake his father's kingdom, Henry Sutpen seeks refuge in his own home rather than running away. Unable to supplant his father and take over, which would probably be considered a positive development by Sutpen, Henry returns home to die, and in doing so reveals another of Faulkner's criticisms of the South in this decision: that the sins and negative attributes of one's heritage can never be outrun. For Faulkner, even in their need to distance themselves from their families and their transgressions humans are imprisoned in the mentality of the South, in the breeding ground of their sins. Henry can never get out and return with a new perspective and renewed strength to rise up and conquer it – instead he is permanently enslaved; chained to inevitable, slow destruction. Quentin is similarly entrenched in this, as dictated by the Biblical concept of the sins of the fathers being visited upon their sons for generations. God, when talking to Moses, describes himself as "forgiving iniquity" yet not immediately, as he is also one who "punishes children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation for the iniquity of their fathers" (Exodous 34:7).

The title also reinforces this idea of sin repeated from generation to generation by being comprised of the same word stated twice, the exclamation point causes readers to have to go back and re-interpret it as a cry out, or a plea. On another level, the lamentation encapsulated in the apostrophe recalls and exposes both King David's and Sutpen's innocence, that both believed they could achieve greatness and pass on their dynasties to their sons, but lived instead to foresee the impossibility of this plan, through

the death of either the son or the design. For both King David and Thomas Sutpen, their innocence places them into the role, however briefly, of the tragic hero. Their innocence leads to their successes in building dynasties as well as their undoing – it is what gives them the drive to keep working and to believe that their plans can be enacted and they can influence society. It is their innocence, too, though, that yields their confidence in their goals and the means through which they achieve them – often at the expense of others. Consequently, it is also their innocence that leaves them bereft, left to mourn the loss of their own dynasties, ignorant of the fact that the building blocks of their legacies were corrupted through their own actions.

Quentin, the embodiment of the next generation, attempts to grasp the bigger picture that David and Sutpen do not see. He wants to live and make decisions outside of those expected or dictated by the remnants of the classist Southern society into which he was born. A generation removed, he also relocates himself physically outside of the South by attending Harvard, and even lives with a Canadian roommate. Yet when he asserts of his feelings toward the South in the end, protesting, "I don't hate it… I don't. I don't!" he evinces that fact that he both hates and loves the South, because he feels that it lives within him (303). Quentin cannot fully exist outside of the South and the mentality under which he grew up; he cannot escape it and thus cannot triumph over it and his internal struggle, one that it seems Faulkner sees as born out of an iniquity and mentality only possible in the South, drives him to suicide.

The Experiences of Reading and Interpreting

Quentin, then, rather than a symbol of progress, is a reflection of Faulkner's criticism and deep anxiety about the South: that it will go on reconstructing and re-enacting the same story. Though he hopes it will not continue to be relived, Faulkner, through Quentin and Shreve, requires that the story be retold. He passes this responsibility onto the reader as well, as he tasks the reader has a similar task of redacting, of taking an active role in the reading of this story as the approach that one takes when reading the Bible. Glen Meeter, author of "Quentin as Redactor: Biblical Analogy in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" who holds that the way in which the narrative unfolds has just as much relation to the Bible as the content, explains, "the way the Sutpen story is told in the novel—that is, the way we see it being pieced together, retold, reinterpreted—is the way in which the Bible, according to modern Biblical scholarship, was made," (Fowler/Abadie, 105). This is true both in the sense of stories being passed down and altered for a new audience and context, until they appear in the form in which we recognize them – many Biblical stories are reincarnations of stories from other ancient traditions, revised and modified by each society and generation as they were passed down. But on another level, the multiple speakers that appear in *Absalom, Absalom!* – each with their own distinct way of speaking and storytelling, such as Shreve's reliance on the phrase "all right" or the wisteria flower that continually appears with Quentin – are reflective of the idea of documentary hypothesis as well, and the authors or voices piecing together the text as it stands today. Though there are distinctly different narrators, they are working with memories – which have been retold, distorted, or invented, and that exist only in fragments – that in many cases do not even belong to them. In this respect, the way the novel is narrated differs vastly from Faulkner's earlier

novel *As I Lay Dying*, in that though the major events of the story must be discerned by the reader through the voices of multiple characters, here none of the characters that speak have a part in the story they are trying to convey, they merely have a background that informs their vision in relation to that of the other characters. It is their interactions and the way that they use each other that teaches the reader how to figure out what happened, as opposed to their individual situations and actions. The way Faulkner's characters relate to the facts they have and to each other serves not only as a model for how the reader, as another layer, can understand his novel, they serve a model for how the Bible is read and understood in society. Various people approach it through different lenses, relate extra stories and facts to it to shed insight (as is often done in the midrash and Talmud), and engage in discussion with others to understand, just as Quentin and Shreve do.

With multiple biased accounts as the basis for the novel, though, it is unclear where truth lies, or even whose is the best way to access it. Quentin and Shreve create their accounts through imagination and exporting of their own experiences of living in the world. Though Rosa identifies Sutpen as a tyrant – she first introduces him as "*this demon—his name was Sutpen*" – Quentin focuses on Sutpen's disillusionment when his ideals of equality and respect are dashed as a child, evoking sympathy for him (9). By having multiple lenses on top of each other through which we view the Sutpen tale, the same approach may be displaced back onto the original Biblical story.

John Irwin, the author of *Doubling and Incest, Repetition and Revenge*, explicates the way that Quentin's envisions himself shapes his perspective on the Henry and Bon's actions, a necessary understanding to realizing that each reader and interpreter brings

along his own experience to his reading. Irwin writes, "Bon serves as the shadow self of Quentin by acting within Quentin's narrative as the shadow self of Henry. … Henry vicariously satisfies his own desire for his sister Judith by identifying himself with her lover" (Irwin, 31). According to Irwin, since Quentin encompasses both of these roles and there is no other with whom Quentin can identify, he must avenge himself and his forbidden lust on himself, which leads him to commit suicide. Using Quentin as a example of a modern reader, or at least one who was not born in the time when the original story took place, Faulkner models to the reader a way in which one can read alternate values or possibilities back into the character of Henry, such as viewing him as someone with his own iniquitous, incestuous desire. The reader, in the same way can do this with both Faulkner's text as well as with the Bible. Faulkner thereby also enables the readers to reinterpret Absalom's character in a way that a reading of just the Biblical text, which is devoid of any first person perspective, does not encourage. Why does Absalom murder his brother? Perhaps he has his own forbidden lust, either for his sister Tamar or his half brother, Amnon, as Quentin's readings of himself and Bon might suggest. Why does David not interfere either after Amnon shames Tamar or after Absalom kills Amnon? Perhaps David does not do this solely out of "love" but he, like Sutpen, knows that with enough information and incentive Absalom will take care of the situation on his own, thereby preventing David from having further blood or sin on his own hands, and preventing him from having to be involved in disciplining or recognizing his son's misdeed at all. It seems that the writers of the Bible would prefer the reader to sympathize with Tamar and to consider Absalom as moral but overzealous. In the novel, however, Judith is a minor character whose reactions are screened off from the reader,

while Henry is a mere pawn, rather than an arbiter of justice. Though David mourns his death, it is possible to view Absalom as a pawn as well, moved around from one cause to the next until he fails at overtaking the kingdom, leaving his father David to do as he pleases with it. The Biblical story stands alone as an episode in one moment of time set apart from a fast-paced narrative of kingship, while Faulkner's version is entirely inseparable from the larger narrative. In this way it is possible to see both stories as belonging predominantly to the father, and by placing him at the center, making him the tragic hero of the story.

Denial of Redemption or Transcendence

In another tragic turn of events, King David is not allowed to build the temple, just as Sutpen cannot reform the system or entirely achieve his design. From the start, or rather from the point where he sleeps with the octoroon woman in the West Indies, it is doomed – just as David's adulterous liaison with Batsheva forever taints him and prohibits him from building the temple or bringing the people closer to God. Like Sutpen, David's morally ambiguous conjugal decisions contribute to his downfall, as one of the explanations of why he cannot build the temple is that he is impure since he is responsible for the death of an innocent man, that of Uriah, Batsheva's husband.

Faulkner's allusions to these Biblical vignettes is his way of presenting his warning that without care and without retelling these stories, history will repeat itself. Irwin elucidates, "it is not just repetition that is involved here, it is recollection as well – that awareness of repetition that, like Medusa's gaze, paralyzes the will, that awareness that the memory of what has occurred in the past is at the same time the foreknowledge

of what will be repeated in the future, the debilitating sense that time is a circular street and that recollection is prophecy" (Irwin, 70). Not only does Faulkner view the past as a time that was lacking in morality and compassion, he also does not believe that the isolation and skewed societal values of the present will be able to champion the necessary change. Both of the surviving male southerners who would live to carry on the legacy, Quentin and Henry, are killed in the end, whether by their own wrath or that of others. He endows this legacy in his readers, in those, like Shreve, who are not born into the same incestuous and destructive legacy.

Chapter 3:

Inheritance and Responsibility in *Go Down, Moses*

In his novel *Go Down, Moses*, Faulkner explores the roles of freedom and oppression in relation to race. Whereas in *As I Lay Dying* these themes apply mainly to language and family and in *Absalom, Absalom!* they extend to class and race, here they pertain to race and the move toward the future, rather than reflecting the past. Faulkner still uses the past, continuing to draw on the most encompassing and influential aspect of the South's history – the legacy and role of the Bible. The title of the novel references a central moment in the text, and is taken specifically from a well-known African-American Spiritual derived from Exodus 7:27.

> Go down, Moses,
> Way down in Egypt's land,
> Tell old Pharaoh,
> Let my people go.

Through this spiritual, Faulkner equates the South with Egypt, the land of tyranny and slavery in the Bible. The relationship is more complex than merely that of oppressor though. Just as Joseph, son of one of the Jewish forbearers, established the system that initially saved the Jews from famine and later enslaved them, both Egypt and the South have a more nuanced and personal effect on the people living within their borders. Scott F Chancellor, in his dissertation, explains,

> While Egypt is often cast by the writers of the Bible as the imperial oppressor, its impact on Israel extends well beyond that of subjugating neighbor. Israel turns to Egypt for relief from famine; Egypt raises the son who will one day lead Israel out of slavery; Egypt provides Israel with the "other" that it measures itself against, as God's people who are destined to cross the Red Sea (Chancellor).

This experience creates the idea of "other," which requires and affects both groups to whom it relates. Following this, "My people," I would argue, comprises the entirety of the South. Everyone within the region is enslaved by shame, whether in a position as either subjugated or subjugator. As long as this division can be drawn, no one can ever be free. In *Go Down, Moses*, Isaac serves at times as Faulkner's voice, particularly in his tribute to blacks. He explains that they were "a longer time free than us because we have never been free" (282). Explicating the idea that "we have never been free" is precisely Faulkner's purpose in the novel, along with imbuing his readers with the hope and courage to believe that it need not always be this way. His allusions to the Bible serve to structure his novel and his progression, from the idea of responsibility in "The Bear," when Isaac is at his youngest, to the motif of fatherhood dominating the stories "The Fire and the Hearth," "The Bear," and peripherally in most of the stories, to the hope for progression in the future, present in "Go Down, Moses." The title, though, references only Moses going down to Egypt to talk to Pharaoh, the oppressor, to free his people: from the start Faulkner introduces the concept of a redeemer, along with the suggestion of a framework for salvation. Moses is to "tell" Pharaoh; he is expected to open the gates of communication, however forcefully, in order to bring about physical freedom. Faulkner appropriates this idea of using the abstract concepts of communication and genealogy in order to achieve a concrete effect on society, allowing his own novel to become a microcosm of his larger goal.

Isaac and Ishmael

In his most renowned chapter, the short story entitled "The Bear," Faulkner presents a variety of parallels and discrepancies between the Biblical Isaac and the Biblical Ishmael, the most immediately prevalent of which is the issue of inheritance. In the Bible, Sarah, Abraham's wife, barren and unable to have a child, offers Abraham her servant Hagar in order to bear him a male heir – Ishmael. Later on God promises Sarah a child, providing her and Abraham with their son Isaac. Sarah eventually becomes nervous about the relationship between the two boys, and has Abraham cast Hagar out into the desert, leaving her and Ishmael to whatever fate may befall them, and essentially voids Ishmael's ties to the family and his place as a prominent inheritor of Abraham's wealth and position in society or the Biblical narrative. Whereas the Biblical Isaac receives the inheritance that perhaps should have belonged to Ishmael as Abraham's eldest son, Faulkner's Isaac rejects the inheritance that is rightfully his, questioning the idea that the land rightfully belongs to anyone. He explains his choice of the word relinquish rather than repudiate to McCaslin saying,

> I cant repudiate it. It was never mine to repudiate. It was never Father's and Uncle Buddy's to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather's to bequeath them… because on the instant that when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realized, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his forever… the man who bought it bought nothing. (245-6)

In rejecting his birthright, part of what Isaac is trying to reject is the idea of scarcity as presented by Regina Schwartz in her understanding of the Bible – that there is a dearth of resources, or a scarcity, and only one man can inherit the right to the land (Schwartz). To Ike, using money, which is in itself merely an illusion of value, to claim ownership of a shared resource is both unacceptable and meaningless. In different ways everyone who

shares his life with the land is an inheritor, and in that respect no one can have a singular, paramount claim to it. For Faulkner, though, the concept of inheritance is much further-reaching than a right to a plot of land – it is an identification or affiliation with a specific lot in life into which one is born, and this is not successfully rejected by any of the characters despite their words. Isaac, as the primary example of one who has something to give up and attempts to equalize, is still living off the inheritance despite giving up his claim to it by accepting money at regular intervals from McCaslin. He does not live in accordance with the values he advocates, instead relying on his inheritance through a few degrees of separation, and merely obscuring the fact that he retains this privilege.

Rather than simply contrasting Faulkner's Isaac with the Biblical character whose name he bears, Edwin M. Eigner, author of *Faulkner's Isaac and the American Ishmael*, views Isaac as presenting himself as the prototypical "American Ishmael." This label signifies the narrative of a disinherited outcast who becomes a self-made man, father to his own legacy and people. He defines the Biblical Ishmael as one who "'grew up and dwelt in the wilderness,' becoming the founder of the Ishmaelites, those who dwell in tents; which is to say, those who have no real homes and no inherited tradition," and explains that Faulkner names "the central character… not Ishmael but Isaac" but allows "his Isaac to behave like the traditional American Ishmael… who prefers to live in the wilderness" (Eigner, 109). Isaac does not fully fit this definition though. In giving up his claim to the farmland, Isaac attempts to envision himself as something of a transcendentalist, or an inheritor of the wilderness. Ishmael was cast out into the wilderness, needed it for basic survival, whereas Isaac adopts the wilderness as his home out of choice. Similarly, there is another instance of need for the wilderness that can be

explored here, brought up by the title of the novel – that of the Jews escaping Egypt. Ike, too, is trying to escape his current life via the wilderness. He aims, like the Jews coming out of Egypt, to find freedom through giving himself up to the wilderness. What this unveils, though, is that Ike lacks the key component of true necessity. The Jews relied on the wilderness to flee slavery, which is why they are able to give themselves over to it completely, whereas Isaac chooses the wilderness to avoid being a figurative slave driver or confronting his social responsibility. Moreover, both Ishmael and the Israelites in Egypt were propelled into the desert by an outside force, whether by Abraham or by God/ Moses, while Isaac seeks it out on his own. He envisions that the wilderness will free him. He tells McCaslin that in giving up his birthright he is set free, that "Sam Fathers set me free" (286) by teaching him to give himself up to the wilderness. Yet despite his assertions and grandiose statements, he does not inherit the wilderness, nor does he entirely give up his hold on civilization. Because he does not fully relinquish one inheritance, Isaac also cannot fully take up another one. Eigner explains, Isaac "is as unwilling to come into his wilderness kingdom as into his plantation patrimony, because he is unwilling to commit the act of blood and guilt which is the requirement" (Eigner, 113).

The idea of guilt is significant in a variety of ways. It not only accompanies the fact of inheriting, which is based on not having earned the entitlement and thus in itself causes some to feel guilty, but is also linked to responsibility, as human error is inevitable and endemic to a role of being in charge or caretaking. Faulkner and Eigner both suggest that there are underlying and less pure motives for Isaac's repudiation. Exploring why Isaac might want to forego his legacy and would prefer to hold an American Ishmael's

identity bring to the forefront some of Faulkner's main themes in the novel: shame, guilt, and responsibility. Eigner explicates, "The American Isaac becomes sworn brother to a member of some despised minority group - a Negro, an Indian, a cannibal islander - and he asks us to call him Ishmael, his brother's name, because for a man of tender conscience Ishmael's seems the easier, the less guilty identity" (Eigner, 109). Isaac, then, in repudiating his inheritance to the land, proves McCaslin right that he is trying to "escape" his guilt rather than face it (271). By having McCaslin repeat and draw the reader's attention to this word, escape, Faulkner depicts Isaac's decision as taking the easy way out by attempting to rid himself of his moral responsibility. Moreover, Chancellor explains, "by giving the family land to his cousin, Isaac reinscribes imperialism even as he aims to subvert it" (Chancellor). Isaac alights on the wilderness as the way out, assuming that identifying with Sam Fathers and adopting his legacy of the wilderness will provide his desired escape route.

Through the killing of the first buck in his youth, Isaac attempts to incorporate himself into the world of the Wilderness. Chancellor likens Sam Fathers marking him with the animal's blood to circumcision, a blood-ritual that conveys and establishes initiation into Judaism. But this moment does not fully achieve his conversion, or perhaps it does so only temporarily. Even though Isaac appears to want to earn his induction into and his right to exist as a human in the wilderness and a bearer of the legacy that the wilderness holds, that too requires a responsibility that he is unable to accept. For Herbert A. Perluck, author of "'The Bear': An Unromantic Reading," this too becomes a moment of giving up an inheritance: he explains, "saving the fyce had meant a repudiation, like the present one in the commissary, of a necessary suffering, an escape, a

freedom from grieving" (Barth, 179). Rather than repudiation though, this is the point at which Isaac realizes he cannot take the inheritance; that though he had a prime opportunity to shoot Old Ben, "he would never fire at it, now or ever" (203). Consequently, in this action and statement he reiterates the idea that the wilderness, and land or inheritance itself, it will never be his to have or to give up.

When Isaac is unable to shoot, he does not just save the fyce – in this moment, he saves Old Ben as well. Unlike the Biblical Isaac who is granted his life back after Abraham does not sacrifice him, when Old Ben is saved it is impermanent, as he is later slaughtered by Boon. Though Isaac can inhabit neither kingdom, his recognition of this is not imparted to any others and does not live past him; the rest of the South still has more to traverse until such an understanding is prevalent or commonplace.

Isaac and Abraham

Ike's inheritance is something that consumes his thoughts on various levels, including his relationship to his father and his family, as well as his Biblical name source. In the Bible, Abraham, at God's bidding, takes Isaac to be sacrificed on top of a mountain, but at the last minute as he holds the knife over Isaac an angel stops him and tells him not to kill his son. Abraham captures a ram, which is then sacrificed in Isaac's stead. The traditional religious reading of this scene, the Akeidah, is that God was testing Abraham's faith, and in trusting God and being willing to offer up his most prized possession, his favorite son, he passed God's test and thus Isaac is allowed to live. Alternative readings conclude that Abraham failed God's test by not placing a high

enough value on his son's life. In this perspective, the facts that neither God nor Isaac ever speaks directly to Abraham again are considered evidentiary support for his failure.

Faulkner makes a direct reference to this scene. He aims to comment on the South and to demonstrate that the previously held, traditional interpretation – that of Abraham, who oppresses his own blood, is in the right – is neither the only nor the correct understanding of this event. By going back to the Bible, considered a strong and prominent textual justifier of slavery for many Southerners, invites a dialogue about cases that may seem closed off in the present as well as in the past. That this story and the concepts and relationships addressed in it are still relevant and still open to a change of perspective is precisely Faulkner's message, and allows readers to bring alternate viewpoints to the institutionalized oppression in their contemporary South.

Moreover, the Akeidah is an episode that places the Biblical Isaac in dialogue not just with his own father, their complicated bond, and the values that they may or may not share, but with a larger entity as well – God – who also passes judgment on his father's actions. The fact that judgment has been meted and a shift in the dynamics occur, but it is in large part up to the reader to interpret and understand the outcome. In his retelling, Faulkner chooses an interpretation and brings up further questions for his audience to apply to both the present and to the meaning of the Biblical story.

Ike muses, "if He could see Father and Uncle Buddy in Grandfather He must have seen me too.—an Isaac born into a later life than Abraham's and repudiating immolation: fatherless and therefore safe declining the altar because maybe this time the exasperated Hand might not supply the kid—" (271). Isaac's phrasing of escaping or "declining the altar," – which suggests that he is choosing not to be sacrificed – leads one to a further

questioning: does Faulkner expect that the Biblical Isaac knew all along that he was marching toward his end as he climbed the mountain with his father, or does he see Ike's story diverging from the Biblical tradition at this point – that he was cognizant of his surroundings and his destiny in a way that the Biblical Isaac was not? This question is not especially relevant in itself, but it points to the larger question of how much autonomy Faulkner really believes his characters, or anyone in the South, possesses. It directs our attention to Ike's desire to escape, to the question of what he is running from, what he is giving up, and where the blame or responsibility lies in either story. And in a broader context, where they lie in any of our lives. With Isaac? With the father figure? With God, for requesting such an action? And who must take responsibility?

The parallels continue, as Faulkner's ideas can be further read into the relationship between Isaac and Abraham. After Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac, Isaac and Abraham never speak again. Just as Isaac is silent during the course of this episode, Ike is similarly silent in that he fails to take responsibility and exercise his voice and his privilege to take steps toward bridging the inequalities. Perhaps Faulkner provides an alternate version of what could happen if Isaac were given the space to reflect on it, to act on how he felt and to respond to the situation. Or perhaps Faulkner views Isaac's silence as inadequate or cowardly, just as he perceives Ike's relinquishing of his inheritance to be an escapist tactic. Or perhaps Faulkner presents us with a what-if scenario: if the Biblical Isaac had taken Ike's path and chosen to speak out and try to repudiate the legacy that he may perceive as tainted by his father's sin in casting out Hagar and Ishmael, then he too would have ended up fatherless and sonless.

In terms of Faulkner's message to the South, through, Perluck's work suggests another way of interpreting what Ike's actions, or lack thereof, display. Perluck sees repudiation as impossibility, in that it is a negation of life. The shame and grief that accompany ownership and responsibility are necessary – for passion, for love, for life. Moreover, Isaac's realization that "we," (the white men) "have never been free" (282) is an extension of this recognition of the fact that shame and grief cannot be isolated and eradicated, but are intrinsically linked to love and passion. Just as the people comprising the South are tied to each other, both whites and blacks are unable to experience love and passion without shame and guilt, all of which are in different ways tied to oppression of the other, and are thus unable to achieve true freedom.

Recognition

Some of Faulkner's characters view the land itself and the attitudes that it breeds as inherently hostile to real freedom. McCaslin, in his debate with the stranger who wants to marry Fonsiba in "The Bear" refers to the state of all-encompassing, mutual oppression as a curse upon the land, and communicates Faulkner's understanding that reversing it will not be a short or easy process, but that, unlike Ike, one cannot make any progress by running away. McCaslin says, "Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land: maybe for that reason their descendants alone can—not resist it, not combat it—maybe just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted" (266). This curse, the effect of shame on dignity, which divides whites from blacks and people from their fellow humans, is expanded upon in "The Fire and the Hearth." Faulkner's narrator explains the way Lucas' interactions with Henry drastically shifted: "then one day the old

curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honor but from wrong and shame, descended to him" (107). This curse of sin, stemming from past wrongdoings, hearkens back to the Bible where God, the arbiter of a larger system of good and evil, action and retribution, "punishes children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation for the iniquity of their fathers" (Exodous 34:7). In Faulkner's novels, the Biblical cycle of punishment and sin does not merely continue from one generation to the next in each work – his body of writing as a whole encapsulates the idea, tracing the path of the transgressions and how different characters address them from one novel to the next as well. Picking up where *Absalom, Absalom!* left off, *Go Down, Moses* presents Carothers McCaslin, a character that leaves a thousand dollars to the son of unmarried slave-girl for when he turns twenty one. Though not ideal, this bequest is a form of recognition. Isaac reflects, "so I reckon that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger… even if My son wasn't just but two words" (258). In saying this Isaac directs the reader back to the same issue of recognition that is at the heart of *Absalom, Absalom!*, where Sutpen refuses to acknowledge his relationship to Charles Bon. Eigner expounds, "Carothers Edmonds has had an illegitimate son with another of the black members of his own family, and that like his great, great, great grandfather, he will acknowledge neither the mother nor the child. Carothers McCaslin had given money instead of recognition to the victims of his incestuous lust" (Eigner). Carothers' actions demonstrate a step toward progress from Sutpen's, in that Carothers McCaslin does take some form of action to recognize his son, though not necessarily to his face. In avoiding what is truly desired and needed by his

son, he evidences that more progress still needs to be made: that fathers need to be able to acknowledge their sons through their words, face to face.

Lucas, in changing his name, brings this concept of recognition to the forefront from the opposite direction. He takes a position of assertion instead of being a passive recipient of tradition and the whims, desires, or preferences of his father and ancestors as they are played out in his name. Lucas changes his name from Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin Beauchamp to Lucas Quintus Carothers McCaslin Beauchamp, as the narrator explains that he was:

> not refusing to be called Lucius, because he simply eliminated that word from the name; not denying, declining the name itself, because he used three quarters of it; but simply taking the name and changing it, altering it, making it no longer the white man's but his own, by himself composed, himself selfprogenitive and nominate, by himself ancestored. (269)

Lucas' act of renaming himself is reminiscent of God renaming Abraham in Genesis 17:5, as it is written "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee." In this verse God changes Abraham, and later Sarah's, name and commits them to a new future with the promise of myriad descendants beginning with Isaac. For Lucas, though, his goal in changing his name by only a few vowels is the opposite. In naming himself rather than granting himself the role of father of others, he, in an action that he implements for himself, looks inward and backward, making himself his own father, "himself ancestored."

Faulkner's use of the word "selfprogenitive" here also evokes the idea of Adamic naming – a concept derived from the first creation story whereby Adam's naming the

thing brings it into being as that specific thing. So too for Lucas, by naming himself he creates his self, his image, and his destiny. Yet he is less successful, perhaps because he does not begin ex nihilo, and already has a framework from within which he must work. He claims he is "not denying, declining the name itself" – and therefore not denying his history along with it. His action is an attempt, to take control of his destiny and recreate himself outside of the fortune into which he was born, but it is one that he knows and acknowledges from the start is impossible, because he cannot break free of his heritage, and thus he retains three quarters of his name. Just as Lucas keeps most of his names, he maintains his connection with his relatives and family to survive, living off of his family bequest.

Though Lucas is surviving, he is not in a position to create change or break the cycle. He can change his own name, but that only affects him, and moreover, he cannot change it entirely – it is his connection to his livelihood. Faulkner envisions a move beyond this point, beyond simply sending messages through words and conversing with Pharaoh. He desires an exodus, a leaving of the land of oppression and moving through the desert, into a period of rebuilding a national identity and eventually into the Promised Land.

Egypt and the Promised Land

The final short story, "Go Down, Moses," brings together various Biblical references into the history of the McCaslins and the Edmondses. Samuel, who was raised by Mollie (Lucas' wife) has murdered a police officer and is to be executed next day, a detail that is reminiscent of when Moses, also in Egypt, where Mollie allegorizes

Samuel's locale, kills another incarnation of an enforcer of the law – an Egyptian slave driver (Exodus 2:11-12). In this context though, it is taken for granted that Samuel is in the wrong rather than justified in his action as Moses was seen to be, and thus in both stories the focus shifts to the next part of the story: the yearning for the journey out of Egypt.

In the Biblical story, the sojourn in Egypt begins with Joseph, who, portrayed as a dreamer, a visionary, and Jacob's favorite, is sold by his resentful brothers "to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they [the Ishmaelites] brought Joseph into Egypt" (Genesis 37:28). Once in Egypt, after eventually establishing himself in the Pharaoh's good graces as one of his main advisors, he encounters his brothers when they come to procure grain during the famine. His brothers do not recognize him, and he plants a valuable cup in Benjamin's sack along with the grain they were given in order to detain him in Egypt and have his brothers bring his father so that they might all be reunited. His father and brothers, who thought him dead, have an emotional reunion in Egypt. Years later, when the Jews leave Egypt during the Exodus they bring Joseph's bones out of Egypt and into the Promised Land with them.

In "Go Down, Moses," the white woman with whom Mollie's brother lives, Miss Worsham, asks lawyer Gavin Stevens to play the part of Moses, the redeemer, and bring his body back, recalling both the bringing of Joseph's bones out of Egypt. This moment is a marked shift from Faulkner's earlier take on that journey in *As I Lay Dying*, where the transport of a dead body becomes a drawn-out, demeaning spectacle rather that a respectable event toward which other members of the community contribute in helpful ways. Here, Mollie Beauchamp first comes to Stevens' office to ask for his help and

while there, “she began to chant. ‘Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin. Sold him in Egypt. Pharaoh got him—’” (353). Mollie’s choice here to refer to Samuel as Benjamin is an interesting comparison, as Benjamin is not sold into Slavery in Egypt – Joseph is. Joseph is also the one who serves Pharaoh. Benjamin, however, is essentially held hostage in Egypt by his own brother Joseph, not the Pharaoh, as a tactic for Joseph to reunite with his family. By focusing on Benjamin, Faulkner brings to the forefront this idea of unity that is played out in the McCaslin/Edmonds family through James’s granddaughter’s child, who will unite the black and white branches of the family. Furthermore, through referring to Samuel as Benjamin, he introduces the concept that everyone is somehow interrelated and, though the violence of the civil war or the holding of hostages is an extreme and unfortunate measure, it has proved necessary to bring people together. Just as Jacob’s family experiences an emotional but happy reunion (Genesis 50:1), Faulkner hopes people in the South can see past their differences and the atrocities they have committed, such as forcing their brethren into slavery, and make peace.

Though his hope for a better future is evident in ‘Go Down, Moses,’ so too Faulkner’s awareness of where society currently stands and the immense distance between this reality and what is possible exists in the story as well. When Mollie tells Stevens that Roth Edmonds “sold him in Egypt. I don’t know whar he is. I just knows Pharaoh got him. And you the Law. I wants to find my boy,” she places herself in the position of Jacob, the victimized and wronged older father, whose two favorite sons have been taken from him by his own family (354). Despite the fact that Samuel Beauchamp’s current predicament is not the fault of Roth Edmonds, Mollie believes her family has similarly betrayed her. As a result, she turns to Stevens as the representative of “the

Law," or the fairness and equality that was supposed to have come with the end of slavery. She chooses to be optimistic, believing in the power of "the Law" in it over reality of the existing systematic oppression, as the law is now theoretically supposed to protect everyone, but it accomplishes this end only when a white character (Miss Worsham) intervenes.

The way that Stevens obtains the body for Miss Worsham makes the necessity of the white woman's intervention explicit, in that when he goes around the town to collect money for the casket and ceremonious return of the body, he says "It's to bring a dead nigger home. It's for Miss Worsham," (360). He never mentions Mollie or who the man is, the focal point of his willingness to participate in this is Miss Worsham, and, moreover, that is the only angle that he thinks will garner support. Nevertheless, he admits that it is a "nigger" that they are bringing home, and takes on much of the cost of the project himself, despite the fact that it does not benefit himself in the least. It is a step toward the progress and unity that needs to be achieved. Moreover, the fact that Miss Worsham intervenes at all is significant in itself for this time period, and symbolizes progress in a uniting of forces beyond racial lines to bring back his body.

And yet, more progress is still to be made. No one has entered the Promised Land. Not everyone is fully on board with this concept of unity. Stevens, though willing to serve as Mollie's redeemer here, has not embraced the role of activist. Stevens understands Mollie's needs as a human, that "she just wanted him home, but she wanted him to come home right," but in the end focuses on himself and reverts to seeming complacent with the status quo, suggesting to his wealthy white peer, "Let's get back to town. I haven't seen my desk in two days" (365). He is able to return to the sanctuary

of his office and his desk where he retains a job only available to an educated man, leaving the others to grieve on their own – at the same time both thoughtless of him and necessary for them.

Arthur F. Kinney, in his book *Go Down, Moses: The Miscegenation of Time*, reorganizes the short stories into chronological order to demonstrate "the ways in which such powerful forces as race and racism cause characters to distort, repress, or conceal the story of the past and present events in which they are involved" (Kinney, 124). While this reveals more about the racial genealogy in *Go Down, Moses*, it eliminates the hope and optimism that the ending instills in Faulkner's (particularly his white) readers. With the conclusion of "Go Down, Moses" Faulkner displays the complacency of privilege alongside possibility of progress, with the intersection of people of various racial and class statuses working together on one project.

Moses Figure as Redeemer

As this story lends the novel its title, more than just administering justice, as the "Law" does, Mollie wants Gavin to function as her Moses. She requests that he go back into Egypt and redeem her son, even though from the outset this is not fully possible since he is dead. And though throughout the novel the idea of a redeemer is not referred to and for Faulkner clearly does not exist, in a sense Mollie asks Gavin Stevens is asked to play this role. But he cannot carry it out, and to the extent that he does act as a Moses character it is not just him, it is the whole town. Bringing back Samuel's body is a communal effort, including various donations along with Stevens and Wilmoth's money:

it is the responsibility of the entire community, both in the novel and in Faulkner's present, to free the oppressed.

In "The Bear," McCaslin reflects, "as humans always misuse freedom, so that he thought *Apparently there is a wisdom beyond even that learned through suffering necessary for a man to distinguish between liberty and license*" (277). Here, Faulkner draws the distinction between the principle underlying this novel and those underpinning the novels preceding it: acquired wisdom. By this point in his career, Faulkner, through the voice of McCaslin, believes that some people are capable of achieving this wisdom, to make the right choice about which to value more highly, liberty or license, and to act on their conviction. Faulkner does not see Isaac McCaslin as one of these people, however, as he decries Isaac for relinquishing his inheritance in one of his sessions at the University of Virginia, saying,

> "There are some people in any time and age that cannot face and cope with the problems. There seem to be three stages: The first says This is rotten, I'll have no part of it, I will take death first. The second says, This is rotten, I don't like it, I can't do anything about it, but at least I will not participate in it myself, I will go off into a cave or climb a pillar to sit on. The third says, This stinks and I'm going to do something about it. [Isaac] McCaslin is the second. He says, This is bad, and I will withdraw from it. What we need are people who will say, This is bad and I'm going to do something about it, I'm going to change it. (Gwynn, 245-46)

This is the mentality Faulkner hopes his novel will inspire his readers will adopt, both through his emphasis on and his negative depictions of Isaac's mistakes, and through the novel as a whole.

Conclusion

In his novels *As I Lay Dying, Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses,* Faulkner questions and undermines the values that the South takes for granted, particularly those that are derived from the Bible. Underlying his entire discussion is the verse that many call upon to justify slavery, where Noah curses his grandson, Canaan to be a "servant of servants… unto his brethren" (Genesis 9:24). This then becomes the name of the Promised Land, equated with the South, simultaneously that which one aspires to and that which destroys him, as his characters recognize, "This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse" (Faulkner, *GDM*, 266). Faulkner, in all three novels, explores this idea of being cursed; plagued by sins that are passed down from generations through the men, particularly the fathers, that continue to repeat the same infractions in each generation. He explores the limitations on freedom and what both his characters and his readers are bound by, whether it be an restrictive social hierarchical structure, systematic oppression, or language and miscommunication, as seen through Sutpen, Lucas, and Addie, as well as a variety of other characters in his novels.

Faulkner demonstrates that deconstructing these ingrained social behaviors to foster equality relies on connection, on hearing and listening. There is a discernable shift from Addie's isolation, rage, frustration, and unredeemable journey to the teamwork present in the ultimate story of *Go Down, Moses*. Though to some extent the moment most poignantly displaying language's inability to allow fully for human connection, where Gavin Stevens visits the grieving Mollie Beauchamp and Miss Worsham and cannot penetrate or understand their Biblical chants, is also a tribute to the potential for

progress. His going out of his way to visit her and makes an effort marks a distinct step taken toward accomplishing Faulkner's goal of increased communication, connection, and understanding.

The fact that the Bible is present in a moment of progress but is devoid of meaning for Addie, could suggest its ability to maintain a role in the evolving narrative of the South. But it is also part of Faulkner's reliance on the established and contested aspects of the Bible and specific moments in it to reveal the corrosive complacency of Southerners. Faulkner, in bringing up these parallels to the Bible to further questioning of the social structures they take for granted, questions Southern expectations about the omnipotence and perfection of God. His characters also question the truth-value of the Bible, suggesting that it may not be worthwhile if taken literally. Though "the men who wrote his Book for Him were writing about truth," McCaslin elucidates, "these men who transcribed His Book for Him were sometime liars" (Faulkner, *GDM,* 249).

Instead of focusing entirely on the literal meaning, Faulkner manipulates Biblical principles through his own adaptations of the stories to compel readers to create meaning on their own. His devastating endings reveal the necessity of doing so, along with the breakdown of social and individual dignity that will persist if they do not. In this way, Faulkner imbues his readers with the knowledge that they possess power to affect change. His characters convey the message that if we created and continue to uphold these oppressive social structures, we therefore also hold the ability to dismantle them, though it is a project that will take generations.

Faulkner, through his novels, reveals a greater message about the interdependence of class and race relations in the South. He employed his writing to suggest to his readers

that until slavery is abolished and equality achieved, in the words of Ike McCaslin, “we have never been free” (Faulkner, *GDM*, 282).Years later, when Martin Luther King Jr. was fighting another step of the battle for racial equality in the U.S., starting with the South, he would reaffirm Faulkner and Isaac McCaslin’s message in his 1963 “Letter From a Birmingham Jail,” writing, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

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