The Compsons: Fathers and Sons, Three Generations

B. D. Tucker

In Erik H. Erikson's *Childhood and Society* there is a brief study of the Sioux Indians.[1] Formerly Sioux men were trained from childhood to be brave and expert buffalo hunters. Their whole life was centered on the buffalo which roamed the prairies in countless numbers and provided food, clothing, shelter, and almost all the other necessities of life. When the white men came the buffalo herds finally disappeared, and after many cruel wars the brave Indian warriors who survived were confined to reservations, such as the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The sons of these warriors had all been trained from childhood to hunt buffalo, but now there were no buffalo to hunt, so the young men had nothing to do but listen to the old men tell their stories of the glorious days of the past when they hunted the buffalo and fought bravely against the overwhelming power of the white men.

Yet old traditions and the customs of family training linger long, and when these young men in turn had sons, they were trained in the same way by their fathers and mothers to become brave and expert buffalo hunters. Each little boy was given at an early age a bow and arrows and learned to shoot at the small animals on the prairie. But now there were not only no buffalo to hunt, but their fathers could not tell their sons of their daring exploits, and could not serve them as models on which to base their lives. The third generation watched their fathers

loaf around without aim or purpose.

Other changes had come about. The white man's government was now educating the children in schools, often taking the sons and daughters away from the family to study in boarding schools. White teachers offered them new values which often conflicted with those of the parents, and these values were taught in the white man's language. When the children went home during the vacations it was difficult to respect the parents who often seemed ignorant, shiftless, and lazy. The schools trained the children to work and to enter the dominant white society, but when they left the school and tried to work in that society they found it difficult to succeed. Their early training at home had been geared to the sun and the seasons and to nature. At school they had learned, in the supporting community of their peers, to follow the clock; now, in the loneliness of society, the pitiless work schedule of the factory or office was too alien a thing, and they were too frequently looked on with cold and condemning eyes. And so, many of them drifted back to their homes, on the reservation, and to a purposeless life, supported by government relief. They were critical of their parents, but unable to improve their own lot. They were caught between two cultures: one irrelevant to the world they actually lived in; and one willing to accept them coldly only on its own terms which they were unable to meet.

The world of the buffalo-hunting Sioux and of the Indian reservations was a very different world from that of the South in the antebellum days, during Reconstruction, and after. Yet the experience of the three generations of Indians to the loss of one culture and the difficulty of adapting to a new one may shed some light on the experience of three

generations of Southerners. Comparisons could also be made with the experience of Japanese-Americans or other immigrant groups as they tried to adapt to the new culture, with children rejecting the models of their parents, but sometimes the third generation turning back to seek the roots of the original culture which had been lost. Always differences will be found when we compare one group with another, but we can learn from the causes of those differences as well as the similarities between them.

In William Faulkner's two great novels, *The Sound and the Fury*,[2] and *Absalom, Absalom!*[3] we have an interesting case study of three generations. The pressure of the past, and the difficulty of adjusting to the present caused great conflicts and eventual tragedy in the third generation, in Quentin Compson. Of course the tragedy was not caused entirely by time and the generational conflict. Other very important factors were involved, but without this dimension, the tragedy cannot be understood. Besides the three generations of Compsons, we also have in the second novel a study of three generations of Sutpens, but in this paper we shall look mainly at three of the male Compsons: General Jason Lycurgus Compson II, Jason Compson III, and Quentin Compson III.

Quentin's grandfather did not become a general until the Civil War, but for convenience we will call him General Compson in this study. Most of the information we have about him is in *Absalom, Absalom!* There is only a short reference to him in *The Sound and the Fury*.[4] It is true that Faulkner added more information about him in an Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury*[5] included in *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), in *Repuiem for a Nun*, and in brief references in some of the short stories

and other novels. For our purposes, however, most of this later information may be ignored, since it seems more concerned with the filling out of the history of Yoknapatawpha or supplying links with other stories than with adding to the characterization of General Compson.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* we see General Compson as a leader in the community of Jefferson. He is an independent man, as we can see from the fact that he was the only one to extend his friendship and help to the newcomer, Thomas Sutpen, and he and his wife are among the only ones to attend Sutpen's wedding. Sutpen and Judith turn to him for help and advice. His influence is still great enough after the war to get Charles Bon's son out of jail.[6] From what we know of him we can say he was a kind and humane man who commanded the respect of his fellow citizens and was made a Brigadier General during the war, in which he lost an arm.

The society of which General Compson was a leader was, as we all know, based on slavery, but it prided itself on the honor of its men and the purity and virtue of its women. General Compson, himself, seems to be have been a realist, for when Sutpen tells him that he had put his first wife aside and had sacrificed his economic claims that he "might repair whatever injustice" he might be considered to have done, Compson exclaims over his "innocence" about the psychology of women, rather than on any point of honor or compromise of purity.[7] Nevertheless Southern society had a romantic image of itself, and when the Civil War started most of the leaders believed that Southern honor, bravery, and "idealism" would gain an early victory over what they considered the materialistic North.

History showed that these ideas were quite mistaken, and after a

crushing defeat and an oppressive occupation of the devastated land by the victors during the Reconstruction period, the South found that the antebellum society had been almost completely destroyed. The Negro slaves were freed and many of them gone. Without them the large plantations were impossible to farm for many years. Money was scarce and carpetbaggers had often taken over businesses and property. Many of the old families declined and newcomers took their places. And yet it was not a complete change. Gradually the leaders who had survived resumed their roles in many cases, and worked to restore the lost community. Though they had lost the war, they asserted that they had not lost their honor, and soon the stories of the gallantry and valor of those who had fought for the "Lost Cause" reestablished their pride.

What was the effect on the next generation, those too young to have shared in "the glorious struggle" of the Confederacy, but now faced with its bleak defeat? Obviously there was a great deal of work to be done, and many faced the heavy tasks and toiled to rebuild a new life on the ruins of the old. The rewards were not great, however, and most of the South remained desperately poor for several decades. Under these conditions many among the intellectuals became cynical and disillusioned. They thought they saw through the romantic ideas which had sustained their elders, and they adopted a pessimistic view of life.

Mr. Compson, the General's son and Quentin's father, seems to be an example of this. We do not know much about his early life and training, but we can assume that he was brought up according to the traditional ideas of a Southern gentleman, with a high sense of honor and of courtesy to elders and to ladies. That he still has some of this sense of honor Faulkner shows in a small incident in *The Sound and the*

Fury. When Quentin comes home from school one day after a fight, his father asks him,

> "Who was it? . . . Will you tell?"
> "It was all right," Quentin said. "He was as big as me."
> "That's good," Father said.[8]

But a sense of honor will not restore the peace and the prosperity of the Compson family; nor can it protect Mr. Compson from his compromising dealings with an insensitve, crude, and materialistic man like Herbert Head, in a matter which Mr. Compson must have suspected was partly deception and probably dishonest. In the Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner tells us that Mr. Compson (Jason III) was "bred for a lawyer and indeed he kept an office upstairs above the Square, . . . sat all day long with a decanter of whiskey and a litter of dogeared Horaces and Livys and Catulluses, composing (it was said) caustic and satiric eulogies on both his dead and his living fellowtownsmen."[9] We hear nothing of this in the novel itself, but it would be reasonable to assume that he was a lawyer, for that was the most common profession for gentlemen in those days. But it would also be reasonable to assume that he would have little to do, for there were too many lawyers and too little business, and lawyers' fees were difficult to collect in those hard times.

Mr. Compson was trained to take his place as a gentleman and a leader in the community of Jefferson. But Jefferson was no longer the community it had been before the Civil War. He was also probably trained in the kind of leadership which would have enabled him to run a plantation, but there was no longer any plantation to run, and he had

to sell the last pasture to a golf course to pay for Caddy's wedding and Quentin's education at Harvard. Like the Sioux brave, he had been trained for something which may have seemed irrelevant to the world he lived in. Judging from his way of speaking of his father to Quentin in *Absalom, Absalom!* he seems to have respected the General and to have found great interest in the tales of the war and of the old times. But though he might be proud of his father, his example was of no use to him in his own life.

Mr. Compson's cynicism does not come out so strongly in *Absalom, Absalom!*, but in *The Sound and the Fury* it is very heavy. (There is not space here to discuss the consistency of the two novels. We may note however, that in *Absalom* the rest of Quentin's family disappears; Quentin does not seem so emotionally disturbed; the father seems much less pessimistic; and there seem to be time discrepancies in several places: Quentin's age, and the time span between General Compson's marriage before 1838, and the birth of Mr. Compson's first child in 1890.) In the earlier novel Quentin's father seems to be a kind man, wishing the best for his children, but he seems to have lost all hope for any permanent good in life. Of the watch he gives Quentin he says:

> Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not

even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.[10]

It would hardly be possible to be more pessimistic than this. Here we should note that Mr. Compson casts doubt on the relevance of time in General Compson's life and even of the battles which he fought in the Civil War. After casting doubt on the value of all the gallantry and courage and honor of the war, Mr. Compson undermines one of the other pillars of the idealized Southern society, the purity of Southern womanhood. Virginity, he says, "means less to women . . . It was men invented virginity not women."[11] This he says to Quentin who is trying to persuade his father that he has committed incest with Caddy. Quentin, as we shall see, found it terribly important that his ideal of womanhood should be kept absolutely pure, and the idea that Caddy should have lost her virginity is to him catastrophic.

Mr. Compson is sympathetic with Quentin and understands his feelings. In speaking to his son he urges him to be patient and endure with stoic calm: "We must just stay awake and see evil done for a little while its not always."[12]

This sentence is one of several echoes and quotations from a poem by A. E. Housman in *A Shropshire Lad.* Miss Rosa quotes from it in Chapter Five of *Absalom, Absalom!* when she tells of rushing out to Sutpen's Hundred only to find Judith and the murdered body of her fiancé, Charles Bon, shot by her brother, Henry.[13] And it is quoted by Quentin in the scene where he buys the bread for the little girl.[14] According to Joseph Blotner's *Faulkner: A Biography*, Faulkner was well acquainted with Housman in 1917,[15] and commenting on Faulkner's poetry, Cleanth Brooks says, "the overwhelming influence is that of A.

E. Housman."[16] This particular poem must have haunted Faulkner, and it seems to capture much of the mood of Quentin and his father, so it is worth quoting in full here. It is Number XLVIII.

Be still, my soul, be still; the arms you bear are brittle,
Earth and high heaven are fixt of old and founded strong.
Think rather,—call to thought, if now you grieve a little,
The days when we had rest, O soul, for they were long.

Men loved unkindness then, but lightless in the quarry
I slept and saw not; tears fell down, I did not mourn;
Sweat ran and blood sprang out and I was never sorry;
Then it was well with me, in days ere I was born.

Now, and I muse for why and never find the reason,
I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the sun.
Be still, be still, my soul; it is but for a season:
Let us endure an hour and see injustice done.

Ay, look: high heaven and earth ail from the prime foundation;
All thoughts to rive the heart are here, and all are vain:
Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation—
Oh why did I awake? when shall I sleep again?[17]

It is clear that for Mr. Compson "high heaven and earth ail from the prime foundation," and all he can do in his stoicism is to "endure an hour and see injustice done." It would be wrong to suggest that the fall of the antebellum Southern society was the only problem for Mr. Compson. His marriage to the totally self-centered and unloving Caroline Bascomb is obviously a major reason for his despair. But if Mr. Compson had been stronger he might have changed his wife, or at

least he might have made his own influence dominant in the family. He was weak because his training had made him irrelevant in a society which did not need him, or so he thought, and his weakness as father and as husband made Mrs. Compson's terrible influence dominant, with damaging effects on all four children.

It is clear that Quentin's relation to his father was very close and that he needed him for advice and to lean on. But Mr. Compson unfortunately could not be of much help to Quentin. Trained in a tradition which expected its sons to do deeds of glory, Mr. Compson lost the opportunity to do the deeds his father had done, and so he became only an idle man of words. Quentin cannot model his life on his father, and Mr. Compson's words, though usually sympathetic and often a realistic corrective for his son's feverish imagination, cannot fully satisfy Quentin's longing for an ideal model for his own life.

Because Quentin in his attempt to find his identity cannot base it on the example of his father nor receive any help from his unloving mother, he is forced to turn to the past, perhaps to the idealized and romanticized images of the antebellum society which he could have learned of from his grandfather. In the short story, "A Justice," Quentin, the narrator, says, "We all obeyed Grandfather, not from concern of impatience or reprimand, but because all believed that he did fine things, that his waking life passed from one fine (if faintly grandiose) picture to another."[18] The South had often seen itself through the romantic eyes of Byron and Scott, and it is no coincidence that Quentin's friends associate him with Scott's Lochinvar in *Marmion*, or with Byron.[19] Herbert Head calls him a "half-baked Gallahad,"[20] and Quentin's name was probably suggested by Scott's romantic hero,

Quentin Durward, in the popular novel of that name, who fearlessly saves the young virgin, Countess Isabelle de Croye, from a detestable threatened marriage and conducts her to safety, finally winning her hand.

As we have said, the purity of Southern womanhood was one of the pillars on which the romanticized ideal of Southern society was based. To protect the honor of womanhood, a Southern gentleman was supposed to risk his life, if necessary, and many duels were fought over an imagined slur on a woman's reputation. Southern chivalry was an idea rather than a reality in most cases, but for Quentin, searching for identity fragments, it must have seemed a formerly realized ideal on which he could base his own identity. His attempt to save Caddy's virginity and then her person were his attempts to assume the role of knight protector, the guardian of the honor of the Compson clan and of its imperiled lady. It is his identification with Henry Sutpen's championing the honor of his sister, Judith, which rivets Quentin's attention on the Sutpen tragedy.[21]

Mixed together with this chivalric ideal are also fragments of Southern Puritanism and Calvinistic theology, warped and distorted by Quentin's ignorance of normative Christianity and his abnormal psychological state. In the Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner wrote that Quentin "loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor," and "not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of eternal punishment: he, not God, could by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal fires."[22] Here we see a mad combination of Puritan damnation

and knightly protection of threatened maidenhood.

David W. Noble, in *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden*, sees Southern Puritanism as having "taught men to seek salvation in their own innocence and self-interest rather than as loving and self-sacrificing members of the sinful brotherhood of mankind."[23] This self-centeredness involves all the Compsons. "Each member of the family is led to tragedy because each believes in his own innocence and selfishly attempts to protect it from violation."[24] Faulkner asserts, Noble says, "the existence of psychological depths and weaknesses within each individual. And he asserts the universality of alienation within the Compson family."[25]

The point which Noble is making is that in *The Sound and the Fury* Faulkner has moved away from the Lost Generation perspective.

> His angle of vision shifted radically. It changed from that of the individual who considers himself a victim of society because he cannot live a life of innocence, to that of the individual who is victimized by a society that has taught him to strive for innocence. Faulkner made an imaginative leap in which he was no longer to accept the image of the self-exiled individual who has chosen alienation as the most important element in his artistic universe. In his later years, he was to work with the vision of a twisted society that created alienated individuals as the fundamental reality which the novelist must analyze and describe.[26]

Quentin Compson is no Frederick Henry nor Jake Barnes battling heroically for integrity in the face of a pitiless universe. He has no tough survival code, and he makes no tight-lipped, stoic remarks at the end. The evil and the weakness which destroy him are within him as much as they are in the society which bred them in him. The same evil is in all the Compsons and in all the Sutpens. It is the failure to

love and the egotism that puts self above others This was the temptation of Puritanism: that it led to a form of self-perfection, which carried the danger of becoming self-righteousness; and it practiced judgmental moralism, which sometimes led to the withering away of love and charitableness.

We began this study with Erikson's analysis of three generations of Sioux Indians and suggested that it might throw light on three generations of Compsons. We have seen that General Compson was a *man of action* who held certain values. His son, seeing the greater part of the sphere of action taken away from his father and from himself, became a *man of words* and a skeptic of the values which the father had held. The actions he takes are weak and ineffectual, and he lives in a sterile world of ideas, negating the life around him. Quentin Compson, seeing neither action nor example, lives increasingly in a world of *illusion* and *fantasy* removed from the actual world in which he is called to act. This creates a conflict which in the end destroys him. Perhaps we can say that there are indeed parallels with Erikson's three generation pattern of the Sioux.

If we were upholders of deterministic psychology and believed that we are all the products of our environment and heredity, or of inner biological and psychological forces and outer sociological influences we could leave it at that. But Faulkner did not believe this, and neither do most of us. We may talk of determinism, but we all act as though we had freedom to choose and to determine (within limits) our lives. Mr. Compson could say, with a fine pessimism, "No battle is ever won . . . They are not even fought." But when Caddy has been cast off by Herbert Head, he leaves on a long and tiring journey to find her

and her child, and this exhausting effort must have hastened his death less than a month later.[27]

There is no doubt that Faulkner believed in human freedom. His Nobel Prize speech was a ringing affirmation of human aspiration and the struggle to attempt and to attain. Without freedom we could have no meaningful responsibility, but as he said in that famous address, he believed "not only in the right of man to be free of injustice and rapacity and deception, but the duty and responsibility of man to see that justice and truth and pity and compassion are done."[28] "Free will and decision" are asserted in *A Fable*.[29] Mr. Compson and Quentin, therefore, were not, in Faulkner's view, mere victims of sociological forces in the South's history. They did not have to take the fatalistic attitude of Housman's poem, "Let us endure an hour and see injustice done." Their education and their reading had shown them other attitudes and other choices, even if they had never been to a church or heard the gospel. Quentin speaks of "Little Sister Death," so he must have known St. Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of the Sun,"[30] with all its beautiful, positive affirmations, in which "high heaven and earth" do *not* "ail from the prime foundation." As Edmond L. Volpe points out,

> The simplicity of the faith that finds expression in this poem is similar to the mood evoked by the Easter sermon in the final section of the novel, and Dilsey certainly belongs with those "who pardon one another for his love's sake, and who endure weakness and tribulation."[31]

Dilsey's presence in the book points out the lack of love and the self-centeredness of the Compsons. Her self-sacrificial life is a stark

contrast to the family she so unselfishly serves. Caddy, with her capacity for love and life, might have been the one exception of the loveless family, but in the end she gives in to her desires, and when she asks Quentin to "look after Benjy and Father," we have to admit that he has some justification in his unkind retort: "The less you say about Benjy and Father the better when have you ever considered them Caddy."[32] Of course, Quentin is unfair, and Caddy certainly has shown her love to both Benjy and her father, but the pain she knew that she would cause both of them through her affair did not stop her from it.

As for the others, their lack of love and self-centeredness are all too apparent. Mrs. Compson's selfishness and vanity are so great that we are tempted to see her as the main source of evil and of the downfall of the Compson family. Jason, spoiled by his mother, is almost a caricature and provides comic relief when he is not being absolutely vicious. Poor Benjy cannot help but be self-centered, but on him there is no condemnation.

When we come to Mr. Compson, however, we cannot be so lenient, if we are to set ourselves up as critics. It may be true that work for which he had been trained and for which he considered himself to be fitted was not available. But there was much he could have done for the citizens of Jefferson or for his family. It is probable that he felt superior to most of his fellow-citizens, and he does not seem to have had enough initiative to do much for the family. In *Absalom, Absalom!* we see him going on a quail with Quentin,[33] and it is possible that this kind of thing was not uncommon. In *The Sound and the Fury*, however, Faulkner definitely gives us the impression that he was rather weak and negative, which is another way of saying that his love was

not strong enough to make him act more positively. In one of the childhood scenes he whips Jason for cutting up Benjy's paper dolls.[34] Whipping was a common form of discipline in the South and elsewhere at that time, but generally he seems to have been a kind father. His sins were mainly those of omission, of spending too much time self-centeredly with his whiskey and his books of satire.

Quentin, too, must bear some of the responsibility for his lack of love and his essentially selfish life. It is true that he received a very poor example from his father, and that the influence from his mother must have been totally negative. Yet there were redeeming influences around him. Dilsey was one, and his sister was another. Caddy's love could have been a very creative and strengthening relationship for both of them to overcome the negative aspects in the family. But on Quentin's side it became essentially a selfish love, not for Caddy herself, but for her as a symbol of Compson honor. His obsession with purity became a monomania. He valued it as a part of his *own* possessions. So strong was this obsession, that sex became associated with filth and swine.[35] As his own mind became polluted with the brutish images, he came to blame Caddy for them and to demand an absolute purity from her. In the end his love for her became so distorted that he was tempted by incest and double suicide. Had his love for Caddy been less selfish, and a love which was given to her for herself, Quentin might have opened up to others in more fulfilling relationships. We cannot know what might have happened, but it seems clear that Faulkner was not portraying Quentin as merely a victim, but rather as one who loved himself too well. In his romantic image of himself, the Compson honor as a prop to identity played too great a role, and when

that was tarnished his love of self became love of death. This self-centeredness is expressed perfectly in the second stanza of Housman's poem, and the life-denying egotism comes to a fitting conclusion in the final line of the poem: "Oh why did I awake? when shall I sleep again?"

In the Sutpen family we can see some strong contrasts and also some similarities. In Thomas Sutpen's case, the example of the father was even more useless than General Compson's for his son. The move from the backwoods mountain home to the Tidewater of Virginia[36] made all of young Thomas's early training irrelevant and harmful. He had to start again from the beginning and learn and acquire a whole new life-style. Coming to Jefferson as a self-made man, he proceeded to create almost from nothing the biggest plantation and manor house in the county, all according to a preconceived design in his head. According to this design he then procured a wife and begot his progeny. Here again the son could not learn from the father, for Thomas Sutpen's action was unrepeatable, and his character was of a kind which could not and should not be imitated.

The contrast between Thomas Sutpen and Mr. Compson is extraordinary. The one, when he saw that his early training was useless, created an entirely new life which he pursued with tireless energy. The other retreated into inaction and created nothing.

Both the Sutpens and the Compsons sustained family tragedies, and essentially the reasons were the same, a self-centered lack of love. But here we must first deal with a misunderstanding of the cause of Sutpen's fall. In *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* by Edmond L. Volpe is the following statement:

> *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) examines the malaise that afflicts twentieth-century Southerners and the origin of that malaise in the crime of slavery. In the character and history of Thomas Sutpen, Faulkner penetrates to the truth behind the Southern legend to assess the moral responsibility of the pioneer who created a replica in Mississippi of the ante-bellum Southern society and helped provoke the destruction of that society. The descendants of this pioneer, generation after generation, re-enact their father's crime, and plagued by guilt, they are shadows of the past, incapable of coping with the reality of the present. The novel, spanning four generations, is an incisive history of the South.[37]

This statement raises some problems about the interpretation of the novel. It is not a question of whether slavery was a crime or not, or whether the fall of the South was connected with slavery. Slavery definitely was a crime, everyone would agree; and the South's fall was certainly caused partly by slavery, although that was not the only reason. The question is whether Faulkner's intention was what the statement above says it was, and whether, in fact, *Absalom, Absalom!* shows the origin of the malaise of the South of today to be in the crime of slavery. I think that Faulkner was not primarily writing a book about the South's guilt or Sutpen's guilt in the sin of slavery. He was writing about humanity and human nature. Cleanth Brooks has dealt in a masterful way with this question of interpretation in two of his excellent books,[38] and I shall only make two comments here. First, Sutpen was by no means a typical or representative Southerner. Secondly, slavery was not the *primary* reason for the fall of Sutpen. Many others had slaves who did not have Sutpen's kind of tragedy. Sutpen was murdered by a white man, and his death had little to do with slavery,

although slavery had been part of his life.

What then was the cause of Sutpen's fall? Basically it was the same cause as that of the fall of the Compsons: lack of love and self-centeredness, and these are sins of humanity, not just of the South. Faulkner makes this quite clear. Sutpen had a design, a mechanical, rational design. To achieve this design he used people in the same way he used things: money and tools. He married his first wife because he thought she would fit his design, but when he found that she would not, he discarded her. Ellen Coldfield he married for the same reason but paid no attention to her except to see that she bore him two children. The two children were part of his design to establish a house and a line. There is no indication that he loved them. The son by his first marriage he did not even acknowledge, and that was a great part and cause of his tragedy. He made an outrageous proposal to Rosa Coldfield, and treated Milly Jones worse than his brood mare. It was this last which provoked his murder.

Sutpen's children, too, seem to lack this capacity to love. Charles Bon abandons his octaroon wife and son to attempt to marry his own half-sister (if the information we have been given is correct). Henry, who perhaps does love Charles in his fashion, nevertheless kills him because of racial prejudice or a distorted sense of honor (again, if the information we have been given is correct). Judith seems to move in a dream-like state, and it is not clear that she ever loves anyone, not even Charles's son from whom she catches yellow fever and dies while nursing him.

Both these novels deal with three generations of fathers and sons, and the differences in each generation. Both are about the South, and yet

their themes are universal. Both Thomas Sutpen and Quentin Compson had abstract designs, one of a family line, and the other of family honor, but love did not give life to either design. The designs were not learned from the fathers, for, as in the case of Erikson's Sioux Indians, the fathers could not teach the sons nor give them examples for their lives. Both designs brought death.

At the end of the Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury* are the words, "DILSEY. They endured."[39] In "The Canticle of the Sun" just before the verse on Sister Death is this stanza:

> Praised be my Lord for all those who pardon one another for his love's sake, and who endured weakness and tribulation: blessed are they who peaceably shall endure, for thou, O most Highest, shall give them a crown![40]

Perhaps that is the message which Faulkner wanted to give.

Notes

1. Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), pp. 114-65.
2. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Jonathan Cape, Harrison Smith, 1929). In this paper the Vintage Books edition, 1954, will be cited and referred to as *SF*.
3. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Random House, 1936). In this paper the Vintage Books edition, 1972, will be cited and referred to as *AA*.
4. *SF*, 218-19. His watch is also referred to on p. 93.
5. *SF*, 403-27.
6. *AA*, 203.
7. *AA*, 264-65.
8. *SF*, 82-83. Mr. Compson also half-seriously acknowledges the Southern gentleman's artificial and exaggerated courtesy due to a lady: "no compson

has ever disappointed a lady" (*SF*, p. 221).

9. *SF*, 409-10.
10. *SF*, 93. I have never seen any explanation for "reducto absurdum" instead of "*reductio ad absurdum*." Is it Faulkner's, Mr. Compson's, or Quentin's mistake; or is it just my ignorance?
11. *SF*, 96.
12. *SF*, 219.
13. *AA*, 143.
14. *SF*, 155.
15. Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 183.
16. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 8.
17. A. E. Housman, *The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), p. 52.
18. William Faulkner, *Collected Stories* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 360.
19. *SF*, 115.
20. *SF*, 136.
21. *AA*, 172.
22. *SF*, 411.
23. David W. Noble, *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), pp. 166-67.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
27. *SF*, 245.
28. Quoted in Olga W. Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1959), p. 221. This quotation cannot be found in the text of the speech in *Nobel Lectures: Literature, 1901-1967* (Amsterdam: The Nobel Foundation, 1969), pp. 444-45, but a note says the acceptance speech "was apparently revised by the author for publication in *The Faulkner Reader*."
29. William Faulkner, *A Fable* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 364.
30. St. Francis's hymn is found in English translation in Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, First Series (London: Macmillan, 1907), pp. 212-13. The actual

quotation is "our sister, the death of the body." Another English translation, by Howard Chandler Robbins, can be found in Hymn 307 of *The Hymnal, 1940*, Episcopal (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1940), and the original text in the Umbrian dialect can be found in *The Hymnal 1940 Companion* (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1940, 1951), pp. 199-200.

31. Edmond L. Volpe, *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), p. 98. The complete text of Arnold's translation of the "Canticle of the Sun" is also found on this page.
32. *SF*, 131.
33. *AA*, 187-216.
34. *SF*, 79-83.
35. Quentin's associations of sex with filth and swine are found in many places in *The Sound and the Fury*, starting with Caddy's muddy drawers (p. 21), and Quentin's jumping into the hog-wallow after trying to kiss Natalie (pp. 169-70). Mixed with the sensuous smell of the honeysuckle are images of the "beast with two backs" and "the swine of Euboelus running coupled within" (p. 184). Even his last hours of life are troubled by hearing "whispers secret surges" and the "wild unsecret flesh watching against red eyelids the swine untethered in pairs" (p. 219). Freudians would probably call Quentin an "anal compulsive type" (see Erikson, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59, 251-254). His shame, fear, guilt, dread of uncleanness, and obsessive need of order fit in with this pattern. Notice especially his meticulous care in washing, dressing, packing, and tidying his room before his suicide.
36. *AA*, 220-238.
37. Edmond L. Volpe, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
38. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 295-324, 424-28; and *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 283-300.
39. *SF*, 427.
40. Matthew Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 212.