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FAULKNER AND SIMON
A POLLEN OF IDEAS

A Thesis
by
GISÈLE LORIOT
May 1982

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GISÈLE LORIOT

Submitted to the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

FAULKNER AND SIMON
A POLLEN OF IDEAS. (May 1982)

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Claude Simon has often been labeled as a disciple of Faulkner or in more severe terms as an unscrupulous appropriator of the art of the American novelist. This thesis aims at distinguishing the borders between mere pastiche and creative borrowing by setting into perspective two novels which best lend themselves to a thematic and stylistic comparative study: Faulkner's _Absalom, Absalom!_ and Simon's _Le Vent: Tentative de restitution d'un retable baroque_.

The first striking resemblance between the two authors is their concern with the past and its meaning for the present. To revive the past, Faulkner and Simon shun the traditional voice of an omniscient author and leave the task of reconstruction to the care of narrators. In their search for truth, their surrogates confront the same difficulties--inadequacy of information, partiality of third-person accounts, subjectivity of sense perception--which they try to compensate for by the work of a vivid imagination. The authors' search for truth ends in the same realization that it can only be fragmentary and partial.

A stylistic study stresses the undeniable influence of Faulkner on Simon who, following the example of the Mississippi writer, abandons the linear for the spiral, a movement ordering the dynamics of the novels.

An attentive examination of the characters and their tragic failure, and of the themes of time and death reveals the originality of Simon. If the French New Novelist broods over the same perennial and tormenting questions as Faulkner does, his vision of life and man is drastically different. Faulkner portrays the failure and doom of man as the result of his loss of moral principles or his failure to transcend a haunting past, but he believes in man's endurance as a hope for the future. Simon views man's miserable condition not as the expiation of his sins, but as a permanent and slow agony inflicted on him by the uncontrollable, invincible, and incomprehensible forces of nature, without any opening or hope for the future. Thus Simon reinvests his structural borrowings from Faulkner with a personal and original thématique.

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INTRODUCTION

The question of the originality of a work of art has long been debated in literary criticism. T. S. Eliot sets the individual artist in the perspective of his relation to the dead: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone."[1] André Malraux in Les Voix du Silence reasserts that creation starts with imitation and behind each work of art lies the cathedral, the museum, or the library. Indeed nothing can be created "ex nihilo" and a work of art draws its substance from another one.

Claude Simon has unquestionably been influenced by the art of William Faulkner and his novels read strikingly like the works of the American writer. Robert Kanters[2] uses the caustic image of a degenerate disciple and finds Simon's work to be merely a pastiche of Faulkner. W. M. Frohock sees an undisguised and undiscriminating appropriation of Faulkner's themes and techniques by Simon who "is balked at only one point: being French he has no substitute for Yoknapatawpha County."[3] In a more recent study, Diane R. Leonard[4] protests this charge of mere emulation of the American novelist. If critics have often noted the resemblance between the two writers and enumerated the parallels, they have not documented it in depth although credit must be readily given to Alistair B. Duncan[5] who devoted an interesting and perceptive article to these two authors in 1973.

How great is Simon's debt to Faulkner? This thesis will aim at answering this question placing under close scrutiny two novels which best lend themselves to a comparative study: Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and Simon's Le Vent: Tentative de restitution d'un retable baroque. Absalom, Absalom! appeared in translation in France in 1953. Four years later, Simon published his fifth novel Le Vent which marks a turn in his literary career and clearly inaugurates his mature style. Earlier works of Simon[6] reveal a Faulknerian influence but it is with Le Vent that the French author confidently treads in Faulkner's footsteps by experimenting with bold syntactical devices.

This novel brought Simon critical recognition, and it is interesting to note that it was his first book to be published at Les Editions de Minuit, the elected publishing house of the French New Novelists. All of Simon's subsequent works, with the exception of Orion Aveugle, which he contributed upon request to the Skira Collection "Les Sentiers de la Création," have been published under the sober blue and white cover of Les Editions de Minuit. The New Novelists form a movement which emerged in France in the 1950's and brought together authors as diverse as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, Nathalie Sarraute, Claude Mauriac, and Claude Simon. The common denominator among these writers is their attempt to break with certain literary conventions and to reorient the French novel. Their reading of foreign novelists such as Faulkner, Joyce, and Kafka served as the primary stimulus for their undertaking.

Indeed the works of the "sole owner and proprietor" of Yoknapatawpha County were read and acclaimed in France as early as 1932 when "A Rose for Emily" and "Dry September" appeared in translation. The art of Faulkner was faithfully and forcefully presented to the French public thanks mostly to the perceptive work of a master craftsman of translation, Maurice Edgar Coindreau.

Faulkner's influence on the war and post-war generation of French artists is undeniable. Malcolm Cowley reported to Faulkner what he had heard from Sartre in Paris: "Pour les jeunes en France, Faulkner c'est un dieu."[7] Simon has read Faulkner carefully and regularly. He has publicly acknowledged the influence of several writers--Proust, Joyce, Dostoevsky, and Conrad--but his greatest tribute was rendered to the author of The Sound and the Fury. "I had joined a lending library: it was there that I came across Sanctuary which I didn't much care for, and The Sound and the Fury which truly revealed to me what writing could be."[8]

The title of this thesis has been borrowed from Faulkner who, in a 1932 interview with Henry Nash Smith, denied he had derived the technique of The Sound and the Fury from Joyce, but acknowledged the influence of his literary predecessors and contemporaries by using the evocative image of "a pollen of ideas floating in the air, which fertilizes similarly minds here and there which have not had direct contact."[9] In turn Faulkner's literary legacy has vastly enriched the soil of literature and has indeed pollinated and fertilized the minds of many writers, among whom is Claude Simon.

RECONSTRUCTION

Le Vent's subtitle, *Tentative de restitution d'un retable baroque* [Attempted Restoration of a Baroque Altarpiece] , which has been regrettably--not to say unpardonably--deleted in the English publication, provides us with a significant clue to an understanding of Simon's novel and a means of examining Faulkner's novel. They are both an attempt at reconstructing a story, a period of life which is past and completed. This task of reconstruction is not undertaken by an omniscient author but by a narrator who tries to piece together the various elements of a story and to understand its implications. The narrator of *Le Vent* remains an unidentified "I." Halfway through the novel we learn that he is a teacher in a lycée who is gathering documentation on Roman chapels in the region and has happened to meet Antoine Montès, the "hero" of the novel, at a photographer's. "Cet incompréhensible attrait qu'il exerçait sur les gens à son insu, cet ahurissement, cette exaspération, cette fascination" (*V*, 106)[10] intrigues and captivates the teacher and leads him to reconstruct Montès' story.

Quentin Compson, a student at Harvard, scion of a respectable southern family, is ultimately the central narrator of Absalom, Absalom!. The raison d'être of the novel springs from the pressing request of Quentin's Canadian roommate: "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all . . ." (AA, 174). Quentin chooses to tell the story of Thomas Sutpen as an illustration of the story of the South.

Faulkner and Simon go far beyond the mere telling of a man's story. Through their effort at reconstruction, they inquire into the nature of truth and of the knowledge of the past. What tools do their narrators have to restore the past? How objective can this restitution be? In Absalom, Absalom! there exist a few tangible pieces of evidence, mainly Bon's letter to Judith and the five tombstones in the cedar grove of Sutpen's Hundred. Apart from these few relics of the past, the narrators must rely on their memories, their personal--but limited--involvement in the story, the accounts given by other characters, and ultimately on their own imaginations. These are the subjective means which they have at their disposal to confront the difficulties of their task.

Le Vent's narrator assembles his story from accounts given by Montès himself of whom he has become the confidant, by townspeople--mainly the lawyer and the bailiff--and by the town gossip fabricated in the beauty salon, "ce point géométrique, névralgique, où convergeait,

se faisait, s'élaborait, hurlée d'une cabine à l'autre dans l'entêtante odeur des parfums et le bourdonnement électrique des séchoirs, la chronique parlée de la ville" (V, 209-10).[11]

In Absalom, Absalom!, Quentin relies on his reminiscences of accounts given by Miss Rosa Coldfield, Thomas Sutpen's embittered sister-in-law, and Quentin's father, Mr. Compson, who himself had learned part of Sutpen's story through his own father. Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson are also narrators of the story, although we are to understand that their narration is filtered through Quentin's mind. Shreve, Quentin's roommate, eventually becomes a narrator in his own right as he participates actively in the imaginative reconstruction of the story in the last chapters of the novel.

How is the reader made aware of the source of the information provided to the narrators? Often we are confronted by the question: who says what? Both Faulkner and Simon resort to brief explanatory statements inserted in the text, such as "as Montès told me later" or "as General Compson told his son" and "as Miss Rosa Coldfield told Quentin"(AA, 37).

Léon Roudiez deplores Simon's concern for "superficial matters of verisimilitude . . . [which] could and indeed must be subordinated to the organic, esthetic necessities of the work of art."[12] The device of inserting statements like "as Montès told me later" are in his opinion "protective statements" which should have been discarded. Roudiez' point is pertinent. Once the reader knows the source of information--Montès--subsequent and repeated references to it are superfluous.

In the case of Faulkner the explanations are not "protective statements" and find their justification in the multiplicity of the sources of information on Sutpen. The reader needs these objective statements to sort out the elements of the story and be able to participate in the reconstruction.

In both novels, the pieces of information collected by the narrators are tinged with subjectivity. Montès' confidences to the teacher are not the objective relation of facts. They follow the tangled thread of his own perception of the event. The result is at times incoherence because of his "inaptitude fondamentale à prendre conscience de la vie, des choses, des événements, autrement que par l'intermédiaire des sens, du coeur" (V, 146).[13] "An idiot. That's all" are the very first words of Le Vent, uttered by Montès' lawyer, a conceited and contemptuous man baffled and exasperated by Montès, this stranger arriving in the southern town to inherit his father's land and whose unconventional looks and behavior cannot be classified in any of "the five or six categories" in which the lawyer sorts out the human race.

The lawyer is the "choeur antique" of the town (V, 108), voicing the opinions and prejudices of the local bourgeoisie. This "choeur antique" finds its exact counterpart in Absalom, Absalom! where the rumor of the town is compared to a Greek chorus chanting the name of Sutpen "in steady strophe and antistrophe" (AA, 32).

In the lawyer's perspective, Montès is "un idiot," un "défroqué," un "échappé d'asile," un "rescapé de Buchenwald," un "épouvantail à moineaux." We can parallel it to Rosa's one-sided view of Sutpen as "the demon," "the ogre." Miss Rosa's life has been colored by forty-three years of hating Sutpen. Consequently her narration to Quentin is too partial to be entirely reliable.

As for Mr. Compson, his knowledge of Sutpen is mostly based on the accounts of his father, General Compson, and is filled with gaps: "'No more detail and information about that . . .'" (AA, 249); "'It just does not explain' (AA, 100) . . . 'something is missing . . .'" (AA, 101). Such is the material provided to the narrators of both novels, "the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking" (AA, 303), and "cette connaissance fragmentaire, incomplète, faite d'une addition de brèves images, elles-mêmes incomplètement appréhendées par la vision, de paroles, elles-mêmes mal saisies, de sensations, elles-mêmes mal définies, et tout cela vague, plein de trous, de vides, auxquels l'imagination et une approximative logique s'efforçaient de remédier par une suite de hasardeuses déductions" (V, 9-10).[14]

These two quotations illustrate the two authors' awareness of the difficulty of reconstructing the past, due to a partial knowledge and a subjective perception.

Both authors stress the role of the senses in the process of remembering. Montès grasps life through his senses and confides his story to the lycée teacher through the memories rooted in his body. The sensation, "chair et matière, jalouse, impérieuse, obsédante" (V, 175) is the catalyst of our memory. Simon uses olfactory stimuli to revive the past. Thus Montès remembers the "parfum âcre, violent et funèbre des bouquets" (V, 179) at his mother's burial, "ce lourd parfum de lilas" (V, 186) in Rose's room, "cette odeur sucrée et fade d'encens" (V, 189) in the church, "cette odeur de chair pâle, bouffie, enfermée" (V, 233) of the nun at the orphanage.

Simon began as a painter before entering the world of literature and we can indeed feel the eye of the painter in his novels. He is acutely sensitive to colors and relies heavily on visual sensations. Colors, often in gaudy clashes, fill the mental landscape of the narrator's mind:

> Et il me raconta qu'il était resté là, se taisant, regardant, de l'autre côté de la place cette dernière boutique encore allumée, insolite dans la nuit, trop loin pour qu'il pût entendre,

> saisir autre chose que cette fraction muette de vie s'inscrivant dans le rectangle lumineux que découpaient les vitres de la devanture par laquelle il pouvait voir d'abord la boutique elle-même, le vert cru des légumes, des salades dans les cageots, le lourd régime de bananes suspendu, les oignons, les cubes empilés de savons de Marseille et l'énorme réfrigérateur tout blanc avec une cage à oiseaux peinte en bleu posée dessus, et, derrière, un rideau à larges raies rouge foncé, lavé tellement de fois que le rouge avait déteint sur le fond blanc maintenant d'un rose vineux, et dans l'ouverture du rideau, tout au fond, un autre rideau bleu-ciel à fleurettes masquant une porte, un buffet dressoir en bois jaune, et une femme en robe bleu outremer assise sur une chaise tenant dans ses mains une petite auto rouge qu'un gosse impatient en face d'elle cherchait à lui prendre des mains, et à droite, devant le buffet, une table ronde recouverte d'une nappe en toile cirée à fond jaunâtre orné de dessins rouges et, assise derrière, une autre femme dont il n'apercevait que le buste vêtu d'un tricot violet et d'une veste vert pomme (_V_, 98-99).[15]

In a more chromatic range, Montès feels the ineluctable passage of time through the changing tones of the setting sun: "Le soleil bas, jaune foncé, glissait presque horizontal dans la chambre, projetait sur le mur la tache marbrée virant lentement du citron au chrôme, puis du chrôme à l'orangé . . ." (_V_, 85).[16]

Faulkner started as a graphic artist, contributing drawings to _Ole Miss_, the University of Mississippi annual, _The Scream_ and _The Double Dealer_. However, whereas the consciousness of the past more often emerges out of pictorial images in Simon's work, Faulkner favors the sense of smell. In a class conference at the

University of Virginia, Faulkner admitted: "smell is one of my sharper senses, maybe it's sharper than sight."[17]

Reminiscenses of the dead September of 1909 invade Quentin's mind through visual and above all olfactory sensations. In his cold Harvard room, four months later, a letter of his father brings back the taste of the dust and the smell of "the fusty camphor-reeking shawl and even the airless, black cotton umbrella" which Miss Rosa wore on their way to Sutpen's Hundred (AA, 362). He remembers the "dim coffin-smelling gloom" (AA, 8) of her house, the sight of the fireflies, the odor of the wisteria and of his father's cigar which is fused together as "the wisteria colored smoke" (AA, 89). The wisteria distills its pervading odor throughout the chapters and repeatedly conjures up the vision of this September afternoon and night when Quentin became the repository of Miss Rosa's and his father's testimony on Sutpen, and of an all-important revelation from Henry, Sutpen's dying son.

Rosa also has a sensuous memory as she recalls Sutpen's "faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard" (AA, 8), and the "vintage year of wisteria" (AA, 144) when her fourteen-year-old romantic heart fell in love with Charles Bon, Henry's roommate at the University of Mississippi at Oxford, and as we are to learn later Sutpen's octoroon son from his first wife. It is through the voice of Miss Rosa that Faulkner expounds his view of memory:

> That is the substance of remembering--sense, sight, smell: the muscles with which we see and hear and feel--not mind, not thought: there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no more, no less: and its resultant sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of dream (*AA*, 143).

Our body is our memory. It is significant to note that Mr. Compson's narration does not rely on the memory of senses. This condition may be accounted for by his indirect knowledge of the Sutpen story, transmitted by his father and by the rumors of the town. But a more satisfactory explanation lies in Mr. Compson's abstract frame of mind. He has no real emotional involvement with life. He is a skeptic, a fatalist who indulges in his like for intellectual analysis and delights in the utterance of absolute statements about life and fate. He has a somewhat artificial relationship with his surroundings and appeals to the tools of reason to resuscitate Sutpen's history. His approach is that of a scientist who reduces the protagonists of the Sutpen saga to "'a chemical formula . . ., you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens'" (*AA*, 101).

After exhausting the existing though partial sources of information, the narrators must resort to an ultimate tool, their own imaginations. Le Vent's narrator uses his imagination to revive the past, giving texture and color to the episodes he recounts, as testified by such recurrent statements as "Et je me le représente," "Et il me semblait le voir." At times he enters Montès' consciousness and is able to shape a scene without the need for any accounts. An example of this creation is his relation of Montès' visit at the orphanage, introduced by "Mais je n'avais pas besoin qu'il me le recontât. Je pouvais, il me semblait voir ça" (V, 231).[18] His effort to visualize people whom he knows only through Montès' report is translated in such phrases as "j'essayais de l'imaginer" which, on page 114, refers to Hélène, the daughter of a bourgeois family, "the Juno, the arrogant goddess of fecundity" who incarnates the threatening image of woman who engulfs man and uses him for the sole end of reproduction.

The past is visualized by Quentin's consciousness in a similar way and it is introduced by the same type of statements: "Quentin seemed to see them..." (AA, 14), "It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see them..." (AA, 189). But Faulkner entrusts his narrators with a much wider margin of freedom than Simon does. It is especially true with Quentin and Shreve in the two last chapters of the novel when they embark upon a purely imaginative reconstruction of the character of Charles Bon and his relationship with Henry. Shreve, at first a listener, progressively takes over the narration although he is a total outsider to the story. In fact he is sometimes four times removed from the origin of the information (General Compson/Mr. Compson/Quentin/Shreve.) He and Quentin form "some happy marriage of speaking and hearing" (AA, 316) and become the very characters they are describing. They blend into the personalities of Charles Bon and Henry: "So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas Eve: four of them and then just two--Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry . . ." (AA, 334).

Faulkner holds free the reins of his narrators' imagination. Shreve invents the dialogue between Bon and Henry, gives physical features to characters, describes a drawing room no one has seen, even corrects information given by Mr. Compson: "'Because your old man was wrong here, too!'" (AA, 344) But the author's voice substantiates Shreve's florid imagination: "that drawing room of baroque and fusty magnificence which Shreve had invented and which was probably true enough" (AA, 335), or again concerning a hypothetical visit which Bon and Henry paid to Bon's octoroon mistress: they "were probably right in this too . . ." (AA, 336).

Richard Forrer, in his perceptive article "Absalom, Absalom!: Story-telling as a Mode of Transcendence," calls this presence of an omniscient author "a kind of free-floating sensibility, a fluctuating tone of voice, which periodically deflates, directly or indirectly various exaggerations by the narrators . . . [and helps] to restore the reader's bearings in a world of slanted perceptions, thereby creating the impression that he is slowly unwinding a reality from its corkscrewed encasement in distorted perceptions."[19] However, it is the reader who ultimately determines the credibility of the narrators' conjectures and shapes the various elements of information into a whole picture. Valuable insights can be found in Cleanth Brooks' excellent study "History and the Sense of the Tragic" supplemented with extensive notes clarifying several aspects of Absalom, Absalom!.[20] One section of his notes, titled "What We Know about Thomas Sutpen and His Children," records the facts and events with the ultimate authority for their narration, as well as the conjectures made about Sutpen and their authors.

Thus both Simon and Faulkner have explicitly stated the relativity of the truth which their narrators will be able to attain, and it is in a fragmentary way that the "altarpiece" will be restored. It is a recreation rather than an absolute restitution.

THE SPIRAL

The subtitle of Simon's novel [Attempted Restoration of a Baroque Altarpiece] gives us a second essential clue for an understanding of the structure of the two novels.

An altarpiece is a painting or sculpture placed behind and over an altar, usually portraying in a highly ornamented way the lives of Christ and the saints. Critics have widely used the religious undercurrent of the subtitle to mold Montès into a Christ-figure. This is certainly a valid parallel substantiated by Montès' humbleness, his innocence, and even his age of thirty-three. The altarpieces to be restored are Montès' story and Sutpen's story, in other words the multiple and complex projections of the past.

But much more interesting is the addition of the word "baroque." The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary gives us a Latin origin "verruca" signifying a "wart" as well as a French, Portuguese, and Spanish etymology signifying "rough or imperfect pearl," a term used by jewellers. Both stories are indeed jewels chiselled by the authors' imaginations but willingly distorted, left unfinished to create the illusion of their reality and to leave their polishing to the reader.

Both authors have been called baroque. The Baroque period dates from the time when artists began to revolt against the pedantic rules of the later Renaissance schoolmen. Faulkner and Simon brushed away the canons of the novelistic tradition, introducing bold stylistic devices at the risk of shocking their readers.

The Baroque is a fantastic style characterized by a luxuriant ornamentation, a profusion of details, a saturation of colors, and a heavy use of illusionism. These features can be found in Faulkner and Simon as they set out to convey the totality of a complex multifold reality. Indeed their long dense involuted sentences remind us of the superabundant ornamentation of baroque art. Both authors strive to embrace the totality of experience in each sentence much in the way that an altarpiece presents the life of a saint all at once. Faulkner wrote to Cowley: "This I think accounts for what people call the obscurity, the involved formless 'style', endless sentences. I'm trying to say it all in one sentence between one Cap and one period. I'm still trying to put it all, if possible, on one pinhead."[21]

One of the characteristics of the baroque movement is the use of the spiral line. It is a movement which gives dynamism to the work of art. It is reflected in the twisting of the figures, the flowing of draperies, the curves of the limbs. The most obvious example of the spiral technique is provided by the winding staircase. The Faulknerian and Simonian sentences can be likened to the twirl of a winding staircase, offering levels of interpretation by constantly surging forward and receding around the same axial ideas.

In an interview with Hubert Juin, Simon used the subtitle of *Le Vent* to explain the construction of his novels: "Le mouvement du baroque, c'est la spirale. C'est à dire le retour de la même ligne sur la même génératrice, mais avec à chaque fois un décalage de niveau. L'imperceptible difference . . ."[22]

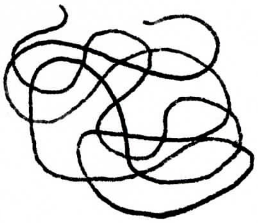
This figure of the spiral finds its echo, in *Absalom, Absalom!*, in Quentin's image of ripples:

> *Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple space, to the old ineradicable rhythm* (*AA*, 261).

Faulkner's novel indeed describes a movement of "spiral," of "ripples," or in Millgate's words "wave-like --surging forward, falling back, and then surging forward again."[23]

Faulkner does not use a straightforward method of relating a story. He prefers the circular to the linear. He presents his reader with a multiplicity of viewpoints, retelling the same event several times but each time changing or adding elements, revising the information. It is indeed a spiralling network of images and events which recur throughout the book until we reach the ultimate revelation which Quentin is alone to hold.

Before examining the details of the technicalities of Faulkner's and Simon's prose, I would like to quote Simon in his preface to Orion Aveugle, a handwritten text which explains the author's "path of creation":

> Et voici que ce sentier ouvert par Orion Aveugle me semble maintenant devoir se continuer quelque part. Parce qu'il est bien différent du chemin que suit habituellement le romancier et qui, partant d'un 'commencement' aboutit à une 'fin'. Le mien, il tourne et retourne sur lui-même, comme peut le faire un voyageur égaré dans une forêt, revenant sur ses pas, repartant, trompé (ou guidé?) par la ressemblance de certains lieux pourtant différents et qu'il croit reconnaître, ou, au contraire, les differents aspects du même lieu, son trajet se recoupant fréquemment, repassant par des places déjà traversées, comme ceci
>
> 
>
> et il peut même arriver qu'à la 'fin' on se retrouve au même endroit qu'au 'commencement.'[24]

The spiral is indeed the vital movement at the heart of both novels, a coiling and recoiling path as described by Simon. It is conveyed by the long sentences leading--or losing--the reader into a labyrinth of adjectives, appositions, parentheses, subordinate clauses, each element adding a spiral to the vortex and translating the voluminous complexity and the confusion of the related facts. The movement of the spiral is further conveyed by the technique of suspension which will be the object of a later examination.

I shall first examine the elements composing the Faulknerian and Simonian sentence. Both authors use adjectives in series either to create an atmosphere, or to encompass all the possible characteristics of a character or event, including its dual and contradictory nature.

The first page of _Absalom, Absalom!_ carries the reader into the stifling atmosphere of a "long still hot weary dead September afternoon," spent in "a dim hot airless room" whose silence is broken by the "dry vivid dusty sound" of the sparrows at the window and the "grim haggard amazed voice" of Miss Rosa Coldfield. The accumulation of adjectives revolving around the idea of obscurity, death, sultriness sets the atmosphere of Miss Rosa's environment and also the atmosphere prevailing throughout the process of reconstruction.

In parallel, we find Le Vent's narrator in the lawyer's office "à l'aspect vieillot, solennel et funèbre" (V, 12). Thus Simon introduces the death motif which recurs throughout the novel.

Search for truth may arrive to "quelque chose d'infime, de minuscule, insignifiant: rien du tout" (V, 10). This quotation illustrates the use of adjectives of similar meaning, almost synonyms, which could appear like a useless compilation. In fact each adjective adds, details, specifies the meaning, leading to a crescendo or a decrescendo, the latter being often the case in Simon. These adjectives insist on the characteristic and attempt to depict it in the fullest possible way. A similar example can be found in Montès' feeling of standing in a sort of vacuum "dépouillé, décharné, et même plus que décharné: désincarné, réduit à sa plus simple expression, c'est à dire même pas son squelette, même pas quelques os: un clou rongé, une brindille, rien . . ." (V, 76).[25]

In Faulkner's novel, Miss Rosa's childhood is in fact "that aged and ancient and timeless absence of youth" (AA, 60). Bon's elegance and sophistication is an object "-not of envy but of despair: that sharp shocking terrible hopeless despair of the young . . ." (AA, 95). McCaslin's voice is a "shrill harsh loud cacophonous voice" contrasting with the "serene quiet voice" of Judith (AA, 152).

This method of accumulation is also used with nouns and verbs. Montès must fight the wind "qui se jetait sur lui, l'assaillait, le houspillait furieusement" (V, 16). Hélène's look on Montès "semblait l'ignorer, le traverser, le nier, le supprimer" (V, 168). Sutpen "chose (bought her, outswapped his father-in-law, wasn't it) a wife after three years to scrutinize, weigh and compare . . ." (AA, 178). "The demon must . . . corrupt, seduce and mesmerize the son . . ." (AA, 179). Faulkner and Simon endeavour to approximate truth as closely as possible.

Both authors shun the conventional syntactical sequence of adjectives as well as the traditional use of punctuation. Faulkner places the adjective after the noun. Thus the vision of the Sutpen family shaping in Quentin's consciousness has "a quality strange, contradictory and bizarre" (AA, 14). Bon is "this man handsome elegant and even catlike . . ." (AA, 95). Counter to common French syntax, Simon places the adjective before the noun. Hélène, this embodiment of proud fertility, carries her pregnant womb "avec une sorte d'orgueilleuse, paisible et sereine fierté" and delivers "les aimables, impersonnels et banals propos" (V, 60) required at social gatherings. Montès is obsessed with "la lente terrifiante, et irrémédiable dérive du temps" (V, 85), "la grise vase du temps" (V, 107). The unconventional order of the adjectives imparts a different movement to the sentence, investing both the adjectives and the nouns with an unusual power. It also echoes the incoherence and the fragmentation of the process of reconstruction.

Both authors use the method of repetition of the same word. In Simon it is used as a means of epitomizing one prevalent feature of a character, as the word "nonchalant" (_V_, 143) to describe Maurice's affected detachment, or "inamovibles" (_V_, 63) to convey the death-in-life quality of the old men sitting inside the café, or "insolent" (_V_, 49) to present the flamboyant free gait of Jep, the gipsy. Simon also uses repetition as a means of criticizing the cold, impersonal, dehumanized frame of modern society. We find, inside the same sentence, four mentions of the word "moderne" (_V_, 200), four "modèle," and three "en série" (_V_, 201) to describe the asepticized Public Welfare office and its secretary. A sharp criticism of our consumer society and its agents born from "the coitus of an automobile and a central heating furnace" is conveyed by the repetition of "plastique" (_V_, 104) appplied to both things and human beings.

Faulkner uses the technique of repetition with a different aim. The adjective acquires intensity from its repetition, builds up to a crescendo which dramatically clashes against its opposite:

> " . . . so I [Rosa] stood just outside that quiet door in that quiet upper hall because I was afraid to go away even from it, because I could hear the sabbath afternoon quiet of that house louder than thunder, louder than laughing even with triumph" (AA, 27).

The interference of "louder than thunder" explodes against the reigning quietness of the house. It reflects the conflicting essence of that hot Sunday afternoon and its protagonists.

This leads us to a study of the oxymorons, which both authors use extensively in order to create a tension within the sentence itself. This tension of the language reflects the dual aspect of human experience with its contradictory states of mind. Faulkner and Simon are anxious to render the inherent conflicting nature of man and life in general.

Michel Gresset, the eminent Faulkner specialist in France, uses the image of the spiral to define Faulkner's art: "La ligne des sommets faulknériens s'élabore tout au long d'une interrogation angoissée sur la signification spirituelle du devenir humain. Cette ligne est à la fois circulaire et ascendante: c'est une spirale, figure qui est, dans l'espace, très exactement la composante de forces contraires."[26]

The use of oxymorons illustrates this "component of opposite forces." Faulkner contrasts words of sound and

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silence as "quiet thunderclap" (AA, 8), "thunderous silence" (AA, 136), as well as words of movement and immobility. Such conflicting terms are found in Miss Rosa's narration of one of the decisive scenes of the novel. After hearing the shocking and unbelievable news of Bon's murder by Henry (news shattering her romantic dreams), Rosa runs, hurls herself to Sutpen's Hundred, only to collide against and be arrested by Clytie's hand, "that furious yet absolutely rocklike and immobile antagonism" (AA, 137) . . . "I motionless in the attitude and action of running, she rigid in that furious immobility" (AA, 140). A similar oxymoron is found in Montès' perception of time moving "avec cette foudroyante et implacable lenteur" (V, 198).

Psychological or abstract terms are also set in tension. Montès experiences a second birth through Rose's death. It brings him back to a foetal stage "lové dans la douloureuse et torturante (dit-on) quiétude d'une vie intra-utérine" (V, 186). The foetal state is one of quietude as it is a protective limbo of unconsciousness, yet it implies the torture of imminent expulsion into the world. Oxymoronic terms describe the house of Sutpen's Hundred exhaling "a long neutral sound of victory and despair, of triumph and terror too" (AA, 27).

As Slatoff justly concluded, such juxtaposition of antithetical terms defy "our customary intellectual desire for logical resolution."[27] Faulkner and Simon invest each term of the oxymoron with equal power, thus preventing any easy resolution. The reader cannot discard any of the elements, but must hold both of them in his mind.

Another common feature of the Faulknerian and Simonian sentence is the use of numerous parentheses and subordinate clauses. Their texts are strewn with short parenthetical explanations such as "(Miss Rosa)," "(Henry)," "(Grandfather)," "(Montès)," "(le notaire)," "(le régisseur)" which clarify the subject or object pronoun. Much more interesting are the parentheses which, as John Fletcher wrote, "develop like living cells, one growing out of another in an attempt to include all the possible variants and alternatives in a given situation."[28] Again Faulkner and Simon aim at the total expression, attempting to exhaust the multiple, complex, and chaotic substance of reality. Parentheses and subordinate clauses introduced by "which"/"que," "as though," "as if"/"comme si" add volume and complexity to the sentence and provide a myriad of possible alternatives. Other expressions such as "not . . . but"/"non pas . . . mais," "but rather"/"ou plutôt . . . comme" translate the desperate effort to approach a narrative truth.

Numerous clauses introduced by "so that"/de sorte que," "since"/"puisque," "because/"parce que"--these last two conjunctive words often oddly starting a sentence--convey the constant effort of the mind to trace back causes, to affirm order and logic in the torrential flow of facts and evidence.

But final resolution is always eschewed, as testifies the recurrent use of adverbs of doubt such as "possibly," "probably," "doubtless"/"sans doute," "probablement," "maybe"/"peut-être" which indicates the guesswork of the narrators. It leaves the reader in a state of uncertainty and stresses the relativity of the truth that author, narrator, and reader are able to attain.

All the stylistic features we have examined so far--accumulation, repetition, antithesis, comparison, attempts at resolution--contribute to the infinite movement of the spiral. It is a constant process of addition inside the sentence. Contrasting and complementing it comes the device of suspension. This technique is more particularly and brilliantly used by Faulkner.

It consists in presenting or rather alluding to a fact or a scene at repeated intervals throughout the novel, disclosing each time a few scraps of information, yet constantly withholding its full presentation and significance. It invests the fact with tremendous power until it reaches the climactic moment of revelation. This technique is what Conrad Aiken called "the whole elaborate method of deliberately withheld meaning, of progressive and partial and delayed disclosure."[29]

The most striking examples of this technique in *Absalom, Absalom!* are the two haunting scenes of confrontation: the confrontation between Judith and her brother after Henry killed Charles Bon at the gate of Sutpen's Hundred, and the scene taking place in September 1909, when Quentin, at the pressing request of Miss Rosa, drives to Sutpen's Hundred to discover "what's hidden" in the dilapidated house.

Chapter One gives us a first hermetic allusion to the dramatic scene confronting Henry and Judith: "the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride . . ." (*AA*, 11). The allusion is carried further at the end of Chapter Three with Wash Jones, Sutpen's handy-man, riding up to Miss Rosa's door and calling "'Air you Rosie Coldfield?'" (*AA*, 87). But the message whose intensity we feel is not to be delivered to us now. Mr. Compson's grim statement "'he was doomed and destined to kill'" (*AA*, 91) adumbrates its meaning at the start of Chapter Four. But we must wait until the very end of that chapter to learn the exact content of the message. The vision of Henry and Bon facing each other at the gate of Sutpen's Hundred emerges in Quentin's mind and leads to the sight of Wash Jones at Miss Rosa's door, saying "'Air you Rosie Coldfield? Then you better come on out yon. Henry has done shot that durn French feller. Kilt him dead as a beef'" (AA, 133). Yet the description of the scene is not to be found in the next pages. We must first listen to Miss Rosa's deluge of words, her account of the twelve-mile journey beside Wash Jones, her frantic running towards that room upstairs, running arrested by Clytie's inflexible immobility. The scene is delayed further until the very last page of the chapter when we finally hear, projected out of Quentin's mind:

> Now you cant marry him.
> Why cant I marry him?
> Because he's dead.
> Dead?
> Yes. I killed him (AA, 172).

Chapter Five concludes with a puzzling statement from Miss Rosa: "'There's something in that house'. . . . 'Something living in it. Hidden in it. It has been out there for four years, living hidden in that house'" (AA, 172).

This gears another cycle of suspended meaning. Quentin's incoming journey to Sutpen's Hundred has already acquired some intensity in the preceding chapters as he is waiting for the darkness to travel the twelve miles with Miss Rosa. A first allusion comes from Mr. Compson: "the skeleton (if it be a skeleton) still in the closet"

(_AA_, 13). It is an erroneous supposition, although much closer to the reality than Mr. Compson ever suspected.

In Chapter Six Quentin starts remembering his journey to Sutpen's Hundred. But his relation is arrested by Shreve's request "'Wait. Wait'" (_AA_, 176). Similar interruptions from Shreve recur throughout the novel and echo Quentin's grandfather's plea to Sutpen "'Wait, wait for God's sake wait'" (_AA_, 247). They express the listeners' incredulity and puzzlement at the flow of information confronting them. It is sometimes a voluntary delay called for by Shreve who is caught in the game of imaginative reconstruction: "' . . . you wait. Let me play a while now'" (_AA_, 280). At the end of Chapter Six Shreve alludes to the possibility that "some one was hiding out there," only to reject at once any immediate resolution. The moment of revelation must mature further. Images of the past must continue flowing to restitute the full impact of this final revelation and to prepare the reader for its understanding. A short sketch of the September episode is started by Shreve in Chapter Eight but it is only in the last pages of the novel that the reader learns what Rosa meant, what Quentin saw and heard at Sutpen's Hundred:

> _And you are ------?_
> _Henry Sutpen._
> _And you have been here ------?_

> Four years.
> And you came home ------?
> To die. Yes.
> To die?
> Yes. To die.
> And you have been here ------?
> Four years.
> And you are ------?
> Henry Sutpen (*AA*, 373).

The "skeleton" hinted at in the first pages is finally explained as we are faced with the death-in-life figure of Henry Sutpen.

This technique of retelling a scene over and over again, progressively uncovering new elements, creates a tremendous explosive tension.

A similar withholding of information is applied to Bon's identity, Sutpen's objection to his marriage with Judith, and the motive for his murder. The reader struggles through a series of hypotheses and interpretations voiced by Rosa, Mr. Compson, Shreve and Quentin. On page 355 Faulkner discloses the true nature of Bon's curse, his trace of Negro blood, a fact which, we agree with Cleanth Brooks, Quentin must have learned from Henry at Sutpen's Hundred.

This intentional system of hurdles is figuratively described by Beach:

> The way in which Faulkner in this matter keeps the reader for hundreds of pages barking up the wrong tree, and then a second wrong tree, while

> all the time his real game is lodged in the branches of a third, is one of the most extraordinary tricks of narrative skill in the history of fiction. And all the more so because it is not a mere trick in plotting.[30]

In Le Vent, Simon is more timid in the use of suspension. The narration of the story follows a rather straightforward order, presenting scenes of Montès' life, as they occurred in a rough chronological order during the seven-month period covered by the novel, from Montès' arrival in February to September when we leave him seated on a square bench, tragically impotent, waiting for death. Like Absalom, Absalom!, Le Vent's first page is not the beginning of the story as it is explicitly stated by "maintenant que tout est fini" (V, 10). It is only a starting point for the reader who steps in the middle of the lawyer's pretentious monologue.

Fragments of the story are released by the flustered lawyer: "qu'une putain de serveuse comme cette Rose ait essayé de l'embobiner et de lui mettre le grappin dessus, ça devait arriver; mais qu'une jeune fille aille se compromettre comme . . ." (V, 14).[31]

The opening of Chapter Three leaves no doubt as to the fatal outcome of the story: "'De sorte, dit le notaire, qu'il s'est alors trouvé pour ainsi dire à la porte de chez lui" (V, 41).

These mysterious hints find their explanation later in the novel. We become acquainted with Rose in Chapter Three (V, 45) when Montès takes a room at the shabby hotel where she works as a waitress and we witness their one and only "love duet" in Chapter Six.

As to the "girl," Montès first meets her at her father's lifeless house. She is a vaguely related cousin whose father invites Montès not out of consideration for a parent but rather out of interest for his recently inherited property. However, the name of the impulsive, brisk, and bold girl is not disclosed before the very end of Chapter Nine. This withholding of identity is also used in relation to Hélène and Jep. It reflects the psychology of Montès for whom names, that is any specific individuality, have no meaning. Much to the impatience and the confusion of the narrator, Montès only refers to "he" or "she," cataloguing the human gender in "deux grammaticaux et ésotériques principes mâles et femelles" (V, 147). The narrator remains a mysterious "I" until Chapter Seven which opens with the relation of his acquaintance with Montès. Le Vent's protagonist is the "idiot," "the other," "he" until we hear him fumbling for words to introduce himself to his father's tenant: "'Je suis . . . Je m'appelle Montès, Antoine Montès, je suis . . . '" (V, 28). It parallels the presentation of the protagonist of Absalom, Absalom! who is ". . . this demon--his name was Sutpen--(Colonel Sutpen)--" (AA, 9).

We find other examples of delay of information in Simon. The exact nature of the shady "bazar" (V, 52) angrily alluded to by Rose, casually though craftily mentioned as the "sale coup" (V, 72) by Maurice is finally specified as "cette histoire de vol" (V, 79), the theft of a jewel case. Similarly the muscular, brown-skinned, proud man whose triumphant nakedness Hélène surprises in her maid's room is specifically identified as Jep two chapters later.

Maurice's embittered rage fills the three pages forming Chapter Eleven. It ends in total suspension with Maurice's furious and humiliated incredulity to have been outwitted "'par une . . . par cette . . .'" (V, 162). This suspension of meaning reminds us of the episode concluding Chapter Three of Absalom, Absalom! when the tenor of Wash Jones' message to Miss Rosa is withheld. Simon leaves us with an ellipsis, Faulkner with an interrogation mark. However, whereas Faulkner delays the disclosure of the message for some fifty pages, Simon satisfies our puzzled curiosity at the start of the following chapter by identifying "Cette Hélène" as the object of Maurice's invective.

Apparently Simon is still experimenting with the technique of progressive disclosure and avoids violent shifts in times between the scenes related. Consequently Le Vent makes fewer demands on the reader than does Absalom, Absalom!. However, Simon brilliantly handles this technique inside the sentence itself. Voluminous and detailed descriptions delay the narrative continuity. An example of such subversion is provided by this very scene of Maurice's eruption in Montès' Room. The chapter opens with a time clause, "Lorsqu'il pénétra, ou plutôt fit irruption dans la chambre de Montès . . ." which is immediately interrupted by an enormous parenthesis itself containing two sentences loaded with commas, colons, and dashes, describing Maurice and Montès. Only at the end of the page does the parenthesis close, and the main clause "il avait visiblement bu" is released. The reader must hold the original time clause in his mind to restore the syntactical logic of the sentence. Such suspension of syntactical development created by an enormous amount of peripheral detail can be observed throughout the book. This accumulation of details is not gratuitous. It serves both a structural and thematic purpose. Structurally it gives a certain dramatic quality to the moment of "revelation." It also conveys the simultaneity of the impressions and images assailing the protagonists or the narrator at the same second. Thematically, it reflects Montès' fascination with details which seems to express his desperate search for fixity and permanence.

The logical flow of information voluntarily suspended by the imaginative interpolations of Quentin and Shreve finds its echo in Le Vent. In the same way that Rosa's voice "would not cease, it would just vanish" (AA, 8), or Quentin would stop listening to his father's account, the lawyer's voice in Le Vent fades away as images of the past invade the narrator's mind. His voice soon disappears on the first page to rise again on page twelve, and again at the start of Chapter Three, and a last time on page 237. The voices of both novels recede in the background as the imaginative interpolations of the narrators interrupt their linear flow, and they re-emerge at regular intervals. This pattern also contributes to the cyclic movement of the spiral.

A stylistic particularity common to both authors is the frequent use of "Et lui," "Et elle" (V, 47, 93-97), "and he," "and the youth" (AA, 316), "and Bon," "and Henry" (AA, 349) to introduce the interlocutors of a dialogue. These insertions interrupt the usual run-on dialogue. Alisair B. Duncan views them as "a series of 'instantanés' . . . isolating one moment, one fragment of dialogue from the next,"[32] and conveying the sense of gaps and discontinuity in the flood of facts and images confronting the narrators. These phrases certainly slow down the speed of the dialogue.

They also serve to objectify the speakers, reminding us of their identity and thus placing a distance between the narrators who imaginatively restage the scene, and the actual protagonists. Such distance is eliminated when the narrators merge with the characters they are describing (AA, 357) or when the rapidity of the exchange needs to be stressed (V, 93).

This stylistic study would not be complete without an examination of the tenses chosen by the two authors. The most striking feature is the frequent recurrence of the present participle. I do not refer to the common use of the present participle as a verbal adjective or a gerund but to its repeated use as a verbal form to describe an action. In both novels, scenes from the past are brought back to life, as resuscitated for the reader to actually visualize their progression at the present time of his reading. Such device cancels the temporal chronology of the narration, reenacting a momentary vision of the past which the traditional novelist would have described in the past tense. It institutes instead a sense of contemporaneousness and simultaneity.

In an interview with Madeleine Chapsal, Simon confided his reluctance to use the past tense, preferring the present participle allowing him to assert nothing more than "une vision, une image,"[33] and to place himself outside of conventional time. Indeed the use of the present participle in the two novels conjures up a series of visions, acts grasped while happening and not completed, and gives the reader a sense of direct experience. The following passages illustrate the use of this stylistic device:

> . . . *the demon lying in the hammock while Jones squatted against a post, rising from time to time to pour for the demon from the demijohn and the bucket of spring water which he had fetched from the spring more than a mile away then squatting again, chortling and chuckling and saying 'Sho, Mister Tawm' each time the demon paused)--the two of them drinking turn and turn about from the jug and the demon not lying down now nor even sitting but reaching after the third or second drink that old man's state of impotent and furious undefeat in which he would rise, swaying and plunging and shouting for his horse and pistols to ride single-handed into Washington and shoot Lincoln (a year or so too late here) and Sherman both, shouting, 'Kill them! Shoot them down like the dogs they are!' and Jones: 'Sho, Kernel; sho now' and catching him as he fell and commandeering the first passing wagon to take him to the house* . . . (*AA*, 183-84).

> . . . et Montès relevé, regardant la scène, et brusquement tout s'arrêtant, s'immobilisant: la femme, la serveuse, rentrée par la porte du fond, traversant rapidement la pièce, se dirigeant droit vers l'homme, lui enlevant l'enfant des bras, fourrant vivement deux doigts dans la bouche ouverte, les ressortant presque aussitôt, jetant quelque chose, arrachant de la petite main le gâteau poisseux, le jetant aussi, s'essuyant vivement les doigts à son tablier, et disant seulement alors: 'Tu n'es pas fou? Tu ne vois pas qu'elle s'étrangle?' (*V*, 48)[34]

In these two passages the present participle aims at portraying an abrupt juxtaposition of acts, eliminating any notion of their duration. There is no transition between the images. Time is telescoped so as to present a total picture of the scene. In Chapter Fourteen of *Le Vent* a similar use of present participles finds its justification: ". . . comme si chaque geste déclenchait immédiatement le suivant ou plutôt comme si la fin de chaque geste était déjà le commencement de celui qui lui succédait" (*V*, 190).[35]

These series of moments remind us of the cinematographic technique of rapid cuts, each shot being frozen for a second on the narrative screen and calling forth the next one. Faulkner and Simon show the action happening, thus discarding any reference to their beginning or their end.

Faulkner uses the present participle to convey Quentin's effort of reconstructing the Sutpen story: "remembering . . . thinking . . . imagining . . ." (*AA*, 210), verbal forms in the present which associate the reader to the process of recreation. Sometimes it gives rise to an unusual juxtaposition of mutually exclusive tenses such as: "Judith *(who, not bereaved, did not need to mourn* Quentin thought, thinking *Yes, I have had to listen too long)* . . ." (*AA*, 193). This passage illustrates the simultaneity of images and thoughts flashing through Quentin's mind at the same second. Where does one image stop and belong to the past: "thought," where does the other begin: "thinking"? There is no possible compartmentalization. It is a narrative continuum fusing past and present together.

Zoellner compares Faulkner's fusion of various points in time to "a series of photographic transparencies."[36] In a similar fashion, Seylaz describes Montès' story as "une succession de visions juxtaposées, d'images figées, de gestes éternisés (si l'on veut une série de diapositives et non un film)."[37] The art of Faulkner and more particularly of Simon has often been likened to cinematographic techniques. Mauriac speaks of Simon's "stylo-caméra" immobilizing, telescoping, or crystallizing time.[38] The present participle plays a prime role in this narrative fusion of past and present, animating a series of fixed tableaux, or we could say retables, often summoned by "je pouvais l'imaginer" (V, 28), "Et je voyais la scène" (V, 69), "It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see them" (AA, 189), "That was how Grandfather remembered it" (AA, 249).

A brief note should be made concerning the use of the past tense. Its most noticeable function is to convey abrupt leaps in time and absence of transition. Thus Sutpen's sudden departure from Virginia is reported in a short, concise sentence: "He went to the West Indies" (AA, 238). Other examples are "Then it was Christmas again, then 1861" (AA, 341), "brusquement, sans transition il se mit à faire chaud" (V, 118), "Et ce fut l'été" (V, 228), "Puis il y fut" (V, 85).

The image of the spiral illustrates the circular movement of both novels conveyed by their convoluted sentences, the technique of suspension, and the fusion of past and present. Obviously Simon has learned the tools of his craft from the American author. Like Faulkner's, the elements of his prose are carefully chosen and orchestrated to reveal the full significance of his novel. The esoteric complexity of his style is functionally necessary to reveal the nature and meaning of the tortuous reconstruction of the past.

Both authors feel the inadequacy and limitations of language. Their constant additions, revisions, and approximations translate their desperate groping for the perfect authentic expression. But words, along with perception, memory and imagination, add another layer of distortion to the restoration of the altarpieces. Language is "that meager and fragile thread . . . by which the little surface corners and edges of men's secret and solitary lives may be joined for an instant . . ." (AA, 251). But it is the only available medium, and Faulkner and Simon do exploit its riches brilliantly. Their profuse, convoluted, and difficult prose is a vivid reflection of the very essence of life and of its reality. Syntactical disrespect finds a brilliant justification under the pen of Claude Simon as he declares in Le Vent:

> . . . ce fut cela qu'il vécut, lui: cette incohérence, cette juxtaposition brutale, apparemment absurde, de sensations, de visages, de paroles, d'actes. Comme un récit, des phrases dont la syntaxe, l'agencement ordonné--substantif, verbe, complément--seraient absents. Comme ce que devient n'importe quel article de journal (le terne, monotone et grisâtre alignement de menus caractères à quoi se réduit, aboutit toute l'agitation du monde) lorsque le regard tombe par hasard sur la feuille déchirée qui a servi à envelopper la botte de poireaux et qu'alors, par la magie de quelques lignes tronquées, incomplètes, la vie reprend sa superbe et altière indépendance, redevient ce foisonnement désordonné, sans commencement ni fin, ni ordre, les mots éclatant d'être de nouveau séparés, libérés de la syntaxe, de cette fade ordonnance, ce ciment bouche-trou indifféremment apte à tous usages . . . (V, 174-75).[39]

To render an authentic image of life and of its undecipherable incoherence, words must be freed from the dull, restrictive, and arbitrary arrangement of traditional syntax. The chaotic complexity of life cannot be forced into static grammatical compartments. In Faulkner and Simon the linear pattern is abandoned for the spiral, associating opposite forces forever whirling, merging and then separating. The gyre is the figure ordering the calculated anarchy of their prose.

THE HERO

The heroes of the two novels share a number of characteristics. We find parallels in their sudden and perturbing materialization in a provincial town, the fragmentary presentation of their past, their inherent innocence, and their tragic failure. Contrasts are drawn as to the respective nature of their innocence and the moral implications of their failure.

There is a striking resemblance in the way the heroes are presented to us. In both cases, it is not a formal introduction, but rather the abrupt emergence of their very being, at once disturbing and disquieting the provincial and peaceful environment in which they arrive.

Against the background of Miss Rosa's stuffy, dim room arises the forceful image of Sutpen's arrival in Jefferson:

> Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard, with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk upright like men, in attitudes wild and reposed, and manacled among them the French architect with his air grim, haggard, and tatter-ran. Immobile, bearded and hand palm-lifted the horseman sat; behind him the wild blacks and the captive

> architect huddled quietly, carrying in bloodless paradox the shovels and picks and axes of peaceful conquest (AA, 8).

Parallel to this apparition is Montès' eruption in the southern town:

> . . .il débarqua, tombant là au milieu de nous, à l'improviste, comme un caillou dans la mare, avec pour tout bagage cet appareil de photo qui ne le quittait jamais, sa bicyclette, et un antique sac de voyage à courroies datant au moins du début du siècle et renfermant sans doute en tout et pour tout avec quelques mouchoirs et chaussettes, trois ou quatre de ces chemises de flanelle grisâtre, décolorées à force d'avoir été lavées, au col et aux poignets élimés, et enfin cet énorme dossier que je vis une fois dans sa chambre, à couverture de toile, fermé par une sangle et contenant à grand-peine un fatras de vieilles lettres, d'épreuves de photos et de papiers jaunis qui constituaient, semblait-il, la totalité de sa fortune (V, 11).[40]

Sutpen "abrupts" and Montès "débarque." The first is given the stature of a superman, a demi-god governing his tribe of Negroes with a single motion of his hand. At once Sutpen is fused with his horse, forming only one living creature, an image with mythological resonance which recurs through the various narrations. The second mounts an old bicycle and his unconventionality is characterized through the antiquated accessories he eternally carries along with him, projecting an image which is at once ludicrous and pathetic, the attributes of a clown. As a matter of fact, Montès is compared to Grock in the course of the novel.

Both protagonists induce a sense of latent disorder. Montès is like a pebble rippling the immobility of a pool. A warlike quality emanates from Sutpen's sulphur odor, the haggard, captive architect, the martial gesture of the hand, the thunderclap, the idea of conquest.

These two men, who are opposites in their personalities and their visions, create the same maelstrom of contradictory forces. Montès' disconcerting appearance shocks, angers, baffles, scandalizes the townspeople. Similarly Sutpen surprises, puzzles, amazes, outrages Jefferson. Both men are intruders and inject a disquieting element inside the monotonous and regulated life of the community. The townspeople display an overt hostility towards these outsiders whom they cannot understand nor label, "préssentant dans l'insolite sous toutes ses formes, l'ennemi, le mal . . ." (V, 34). The wind blowing fiercely throughout the pages of Le Vent symbolizes this countercurrent of hostility as if "l'ouragan faisait partie de cette tacite conjuration qui semblait l'avoir accueilli ici, ourdie à la fois par les hommes et les éléments pour le rejeter, le refouler, le renvoyer là d'où il venait" (V, 26).[41]

The past of both heroes remain a puzzle. We learn only scraps of information. Montès, only a foetus in his mother's womb, was taken away after she discovered her husband's infidelity. We know only that he lived in the north of France, working as a local photographer, and that he broke up a relationship with a girl there. This lack of information is deliberate as it implies the irrelevance of knowing anything more. It thematically reflects Simon's view of life--past, present, future--as meaningless and absurd.

Sutpen's past is more extensively treated as it is an essential piece of information for an understanding of the character's ruthlessness and his failure.

Chapter Seven reveals part of Sutpen's background as he recounted it to his only friend, Quentin's grandfather, during an animal-like hunt for the escaped architect. Sutpen was born of a poor white family in the West Virginia mountains who migrated to the Tidewater region to work on a cotton plantation. There, when he was fourteen, took place the central event which conditioned his entire destiny. Calling at the front door of a rich planter, Sutpen was abruptly dismissed to the back door by a Negro servant, without being given the time to deliver his father's message. His humiliation and his total incomprehension of this arbitrary rejection prompted a rapid and fiery inner exchange between the two selves of the fourteen-year-old mind:

> *But I can kill him.--No. That wouldn't do no good--Then what shall we do about it?--I don't know* . . . *I not only wasn't doing any good to him by telling it* [the message from his father] *or any harm by not telling it, there aint any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him*. . . . He thought 'If you were fixing to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first thing you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle you could borrow or steal or make, wouldn't it?' and he said Yes. 'But this aint a question of rifles. So to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with. You see?' and he said Yes again. He left that night (*AA*, 237-38).

This passage gives us an instructive insight into the character of Sutpen. His simplistic rationalization of the incident, his quickness in decision and act are traits of the grown man and hold the seeds of his eventual failure. He resolves that he will never again experience humiliation and rejection and to that end will acquire the necessary instruments--money, house, slaves, manners, incidentally a wife--to erect a grand Sutpen dynasty. It becomes an all-consuming desire. Sutpen resembles the David of Second Samuel who prays for the establishment of his house.

But Sutpen neither prays nor asks for any favor. He dedicates his boundless energy, his efforts, and his whole being to reach his goal. He sets out for the West Indies that very night, then works in Haiti for a sugar planter whose daughter, Eulalie Bon, he marries. His dream seems to be taking shape until he learns his wife has Negro blood. Although he does not act out of any racial hatred, he must repudiate his wife (along with their son, Charles) whom "he had found unsuitable to his purpose and so put aside, though providing for her" (AA, 247). This is Sutpen's special moral code. By ensuring the financial welfare of his first wife and son, he feels absolved from any moral debt and further responsibility. Later he displays a total lack of humanity toward his son whom he refuses to acknowledge. He crudely proposes to Rosa "to breed together for test and sample and if it was a boy they would marry" (AA, 177). He cruelly casts Milly Jones aside like an animal: "'Well, Milly, too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable'" (AA, 286). His frame of mind remains that of the fourteen-year-old boy who naïvely believes material possessions will transform him into an authentic aristocratic planter. His fundamental error, which he never recognizes nor even suspects, is to equate the means with the end. At best he acknowledges a mistake of calculation.

This is Sutpen's special kind of "innocence," a term used by Mr. Compson and his father. His innocence is the fundamental inability to take the human element into account, the innocence to believe that "the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out" (AA, 263). Sutpen is a rationalist who believes he is the master of his destiny and can forge his future through sheer calculation, efficiency, and courage. His naïveté brings about the collapse of his great design as he discards indiscriminately all impediments--even when they are his own blood and flesh--to the accomplishment of his goal.

If Sutpen's innocence is an ignorance of the human element, Montès displays the innocence of the man who is not aware of evil. He does not recognize the prostitute in the three-inch heels, the charred-looking eyes, the red coral painted nails, and the gaudy rings displayed by the daughter of his father's tenant. He speaks in favor of Jep, the gipsy, the petty thief: "Mais ce n'était pas un vrai voleur" (V, 79). He makes excuses for Maurice although this sordid salesman intrudes into the privacy of Montès' room, searches his suitcase, reads his letters, and attempts to blackmail him: "Il est malheureux. Il souffre" (V, 136), "Après tout il n'avait peut-être voulu que plaisanter" (V, 145). Although he is the victim of others' violence, Montès blames it on himself: "C'est de ma faute," "J'ai été idiot." His own few short fits of anger shame and frighten him. He refuses to buy a car, a tool which would bring an enjoyable mobility to this passionate photographer, for the sole--and for him shameful and excruciating--reason that he ran over a dog when learning how to drive. In money matters, Montès displays a total guilelessness. In fact he has no interest in any kind of possessions. His camera, his old bicycle, and his worn-out canvas file preserving old letters and pictures are his only necessities.

Stuart W. Sykes sees in the story of Montès "an allegory on the nature and possibilty of sainthood."[42] This religious connotation has already been suggested by the metaphor of the altarpiece in the subtitle. Indeed the character of Montès oscillates between the saint and the idiot, much in the same way as Sutpen is alternately the demon haunting Rosa or the proud man with indomitable courage whom Quentin's grandfather sees riding erect on his black stallion.

Montès' potential for sainthood is found in his compassion and kindness toward other people, his humbleness, his disinterest in worldly possessions, the attraction he holds for children, and the town hostility which opposes his arrival. He is subjected to temptations, "tentations de l'argent, puis de la chair" (_V_, 82). He is confronted with an incarnation of Judas, the false and weak Maurice. These attributes of sainthood are the essence of Montès' innocence. It is a lack of worldly wisdom which brings about his failure. His sincere efforts to help Rose meet with death. His attempts at contributing anything to his environment are doomed to failure.

The innocence displayed by Montès and Sutpen is a lack of knowledge which is fatal to them. Sutpen is ignorant of the human element, Montès of evil. Their innocence is their failure. Sutpen's inhumanity engenders the collapse of his design and his violent death. As to Montès, he loses everything: his family property and the three people he loves, Rose and her two daughters.

This destructive kind of innocence reaches tragic dimensions. Faulkner explains the failure of Sutpen in terms of the Greek concept of fate: "the Greeks destroyed him, the old Greek concept of tragedy. He wanted a son which symbolized this ideal, and he got too many sons--his sons destroyed one another and then him. He was left with--the only son he had left was a Negro."[43]

Sutpen's failure is tragic in the way he struggles not only against the elements (his tireless efforts to build Sutpen's Hundred and to reconstruct it after the war) but also against time and fate. He believes in his omnipotent strength and tries to defy the forces of nature until the very end, even though "he must have felt and heard the design--house, position, posterity and all--come down like it had been built out of smoke, making no sound, creating no rush of displaced air and not even leaving any debris" (AA, 267).

His tragedy resides in his heroic although doomed struggle to dominate the forces at work around him and to defeat fate. He believes himself free to choose and forge his own life whereas he is inevitably walking towards his destiny.

This same concept of tragedy emanates from Montès' story. Le Vent's innocent protagonist displays a double aspect of heroism verging on sainthood and on pathetic ludicrousness. Isn't tragedy "in a way walking a tightrope between the ridiculous--between the bizarre and the terrible," as Faulkner said?[44]

Oxymoronic terms portray Montès' struggle against fate: "cette paisible obstination dans l'impossible, l'irréalisable, en dépit des conseils, cet insolent défi en un mot" (V, 20), and again "cette sorte de paisible acharnement, de tranquille obstination qui semblait l'habiter ou plutôt le posséder, le faire agir en dehors ou même au rebours de sa propre volonté et de ses propres désirs" (V, 26).[45] His compassionate attempts at helping others receive no reward and remain tragically vain.

Like Sutpen, Montès defies the impossible. The two heroes share this quality of heroic perseverance and fortitude in the face of impossible odds. However, contrary to Sutpen who struggles until the end "to hold clear and free above a maelstrom of unpredictable and unreasoning human beings . . . his code of logic and morality, his formula and recipe of fact and deduction whose balanced sum and product declined, refused to swim or even float" (AA, 275), Montès reaches, if not knowledge, at least a painful lucidity. Our final sight of him sitting on the windswept square bench, immobile and only existing, conveys the sign of his tragic lucidity: he perceives the meaninglessness of all human actions in a world governed by uncontrollable forces.

Faulkner and Simon make a tragic statement on human limitations against a pitiless destiny. But if the authors concur on the tragedy of life which is (as Faulkner says) "the same frantic steeplechase toward nothing,"[46] or "Le Néant"[47] in Simon's own terms, if both recognize the anguishing condition of man caught in a whirlpool of opposite forces, they are at variance as to the meaning of man's potential for endurance.

Simon's view is terribly bleak. His protagonists bear the signs of putrefaction as we shall see in the course of the next chapter. They are powerless in an incoherent world and the victims of the all-consuming flux of time. There is no hope for Montès, only the resource of passive acceptance and resignation in an immobile wait for death.

Fate hangs as inexorably over Faulkner's characters who, like Judith, ponder the ultimate meaning of their puppet-like life. But it has the flavour of moral retribution. Sutpen is tragically heroic but his lack of feelings severs him from the human family and is the cause of his doom. In contrast we have the enduring figures of Judith and Clytie, whose compassion and dedication touch our sensitivity. Faulkner's heroes may be doomed, but it does not imply their abdication. Faulkner expressed his unflinching faith in man in his Nobel Prize speech of acceptance:

> I decline to accept the end of man. It is easy enough to say that man is immortal simply because he will endure; that when the last ding-dong of doom has clanged and faded from the last worthless rock hanging tideless in the last red and dying evening, that even then there will still be one more sound: that of his puny inexhaustible voice, still talking. I refuse to accept this. I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.[48]

Absalom, Absalom! gives us a bleak picture which seems to belie Faulkner's proclamation. However, we must be cautious not to equate this pervading gloom with an irretrievable pessimism on the author's part. Sutpen bred his own failure. Faulkner does not provide any ready answers, but the future examination of Quentin's attitude towards the past will show other errors which accelerate the march of fate.

PAST, PRESENT, AND DEATH

Faulkner and Simon set their characters in the painful perspective of a continuous flux of time. It is a threatening and invincible force which constantly reminds the heroes of their mortality.

The two authors use analogies to present this concept. As we have noted earlier, the senses kindle the memory process. Visual sensations also generate the image of time. Montès senses the passing of time through the motions and changes of nature. The slow drifting of the clouds, this "lent cheminement du ciel pommelé" (V, 99) provokes panic, revolt, and anguish in Montès as he realizes his utter powerlessness to arrest it. The hypnotizing image of the sun patch creeping against a wall and gradually changing color arouses the agonizing perception of the inexorable fleeing of time:

> . . .il s'aperçut alors que le soleil avait tourné, frappait à ce moment le retour de la fenêtre, atteignait le mur opposé: d'abord une simple raie plus claire, aux contours flous, puis une frange dorée, puis un mince triangle s'étirant, s'affirmant, progressant insensiblement dans la lente et vide après-midi (pouvant sentir, me dit-il, le temps, l'éternel recommencement, l'éternel cheminement de la

> matière inerte, insensible, tournant dans l'infini, se déplaçant avec cette foudroyante et implacable lenteur, promesse d'un lent supplice, d'une lente agonie . . . (V, 198).[49]

The notion of time is perceived in a similar way by Quentin during the long afternoon of listening to Miss Rosa's recount:

> It should have been later than it was; it should have been late, yet the yellow slashes of mote-palpitant sunlight were latticed no higher up the impalpable wall of gloom which separated them; the sun seemed hardly to have moved (AA, 22).

Several metaphors stud the text of the novels. Critics see Wash's rusty scythe as a symbol of Father Time in Absalom, Absalom!. Mr. Compson uses the image of the "stage manager" (AA, 73) striking the set and disposing of the actor Sutpen. Shreve speaks of Sutpen's last frantic run before meeting "his Creditor" (AA, 178).

Simon presents us with the most striking and vivid images of the elapsing of time. The title of his novel is itself metaphoric, for the wind, this permanent hurricane assailing the southern town, embodies the unleashed force of never-ending time. Simon often describes in liquid terms the flow of time which is impossible to arrest or slow down. It is by turns the powerful rush from a valve forever stuck open, the welling of sweat, the bleeding of an open wound, the rushing of blood into the arteries, or sand and water running through children's fingers. Time, like liquids, is fluid, slipping, impossible to hold or stop. It wears the glaucous green of sea depths or the black of an unfathomable abyss. In a very evocative image, its race is compared to "la course d'un voleur chaussé d'espadrilles" (V, 172), silently and surreptitiously stealing away our life.

How do the two heroes react to this elusive thief? The very physiognomy of Sutpen reflects his consuming obsession with time. His face is at once characterized by "that oven's fever" (AA, 33), "that fever mental or physical--of a need for haste, of time fleeing beneath him" (AA, 34).

Sutpen's entire life is a struggle against the ineluctable advance of the clock hands working against the realization of his design. He resents the wasted years in Haiti "which would now leave me behind my schedule" (AA, 264). The accomplishment of his design is further upset by Henry's rejection of his birthright and his killing of Bon. Sutpen must start the foundation of his mansion and his dynasty all over again after the war. He undoubtedly would still have desperately kept on striving to meet his schedule despite old age and difficulties if Wash Jones had not cut the thread of his life with the rusty scythe.

Sutpen races to outrun and thwart death. Montès longs for immobility, a longing ironically contrasting with the fury engendered quite unwittingly by his very presence. The narrator tells us that Montès "adore ce qui ne bouge pas (V, 238), referring to his passion for photography, a deceptive way to immobilize time and the suffering it implies. However, between his craving for immobility, "cette détermination de paix" (V, 76), and his desire to help Rose, Montès chooses action. Then he experiences the same sense of urgency that Sutpen does in face of the inexorable passing of time. Although he has no vision of a great dynasty to establish, Montès feels the pressing call of an obscure mission, "Cette chose qu'il savait qu'il devait faire" (V, 85). We are to understand that this mission consists in helping Rose (and Jep) out of the dangerous situation caused by the jewel theft before it is too late. But time has no concern for human predicaments and pursues its irreversible course, soon tolling the death of Rose and Jep.

We must note the presence of specific references to the actual time of the clock which are particularly significant in Absalom, Absalom!. They are few but their very scarcity deserves our attention. In Absalom, Absalom! the clock references appear as the task of reconstruction is nearing completion and tension has built up. In their cold Harvard room, Quentin and Shreve spend their night piecing together and reconstructing Sutpen's story. As the night advances, the coldness of the room becomes tomblike. Chapter Seven brings the first time reference: eleven o'clock (AA, 275). In Chapter Eight, "soon the chimes would ring for midnight" (AA, 293), and they do so in the course of the chapter (AA, 325). Finally, just following Quentin's disclosure of his conversation with Henry, one o'clock is approaching (AA, 373), and the ringing of the chimes soon fills the now-silent room (AA, 374).

These mentions of precise chronological time are not gratuitous. They are hours to count until we reach the crucial moment of revelation, this hour so long delayed to hear what Quentin experienced and heard that dead September night at Sutpen's Hundred.

Quentin's increasing awareness of the chimes in the last part of the novel conveys his sense of the imminence of this moment of revelation. Just as he cannot pass that door upstairs at Sutpen's Hundred, where Henry confronted Judith, and face the implications of Henry's killing of Bon on account of miscegenation, neither can Quentin pass the door behind which lies the corpse-like figure of Henry. The structural suspension of these two dramatic scenes reflects Quentin's fear and inability to cope with the meaning of these episodes and his postponement of his own confrontation with them. But the chimes ring the hours and precipitate the all-significant moment as the process of reconstruction comes to an end.

The weighty ringing of the chimes occurs each time after a direct or indirect reference to Quentin's discovery. It is an explicit reference to his journey to Sutpen's Hundred on page 274, the mention of Henry and Sutpen's desire for a son on page 292, the sinful possibility of incest on page 324. Although he dreads facing its implications, Quentin cannot delay any longer the necessary voicing of his experience to complete his task of reconstruction.

"The chimes would ring for one any time now" follows his revelation. It is the ultimate hour. The clock strikes the end of the reconstruction of Sutpen's story which collapses into flames and sets off the endless howling of Sutpen's idiot great-grandchild.

The clock references in Le Vent carry less intensity. Montès experiences a similar acceleration of time as he senses the imminence of catastrophe. Twice in the novel he asks for the exact time, desperately checking the progression of the hours, still hoping to find a solution to Rose's problems or to the guardianship of her two daughters before the clock sounds his failure. He records with some relief "Ainsi il n'est que midi" (V, 196), but there is no solution to find, no possibility of arresting the motion of time. Montès can only try to reach out for a passive immobility in the slow and meaningless succession of hours.

So far this examination has shown the characters' painful perception of time in a present fleeing away and rushing towards a fatal end. Yet the two novels are reconstructions of the past based on memory, this deceptive ally. What is the meaning of the past for its restorers? What insight, if any, do the narrators gain to face the problems of the present? In one of his class conferences, Faulkner marked three attitudes:

> 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.[50]

Miss Rosa and Mr. Compson illustrate the second attitude, which is a kind of death in itself, a total divorce from actual life. Rosa emotionally explains Sutpen's story in terms of a divine justice presiding over human events, whose curse on her family and the South cannot be countered. She buries herself in the grim solitude of her cave-like house inhabited by the ghosts of the past, harking back for forty-three years to the same old stories of hatred and outrage.

Mr. Compson gives history the color of a tragic and absurd drama capriciously pre-ordained by an omnipotent stage manager. He displays a detached fatalism, entrenching himself behind disillusioned and uninvolved statements on the meaninglessness of life.

Quentin resorts to the first solution as we learn from The Sound and the Fury in which he commits suicide, merging with the reflection of his shadow in the Charles River, five months after his narration of the Sutpen story. He cannot assume the "rot" dug out by his reconstruction, as he knows it is part of the inheritance he must live with.

Quentin has reached a cyclical interpretation of history as illustrated by the image of the ripple eternally attached and moving to "the old ineradicable rhythm." His awareness of historical continuity gives him a sense of his own identity: "Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us" (AA, 262). Quentin could have added "and Henry Sutpen to make all of us." This is the door which Quentin opens but cannot pass. In the course of his imaginative reconstruction, he identifies with Henry but tragically cannot go beyond this identification and assume the personality of Quentin Compson, a young man attending Harvard. The past engulfs him.

Faulkner has repeatedly voiced his belief that man is the sum of his past. He told Jean Stein, "There is no such thing as _was_--only _is_. If _was_ existed there would be no grief or sorrow."[51] On another occasion he said "That time _is_, and if there's no such thing as _was_, then there is no such thing as _will_ be."[52]

Quentin cannot accept his belonging to a past which is his present and forges his future. He cannot exorcise the ghosts of the past and the vision of the emaciated and "wasted yellow face" of Henry. He remains "a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts" (_AA_, 12). Although he feels that he is "still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost" (_AA_, 9), Quentin is already dead to life, as suggested in the tomblike air of his Harvard room, his immobility, his "flat curiously dead voice" (_AA_, 258) which soon ceases to speak, not even to answer Shreve. "Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore Nevermore Nevermore" (_AA_, 373) is Quentin's cry of despair at the prospect of a dreary future which would be the ritualistic recitation of a sinful past.

None of the narrators of _Absalom, Absalom!_ adopt the third attitude--that of positive action--defined by Faulkner. We must turn to Judith and Clytie to find examples of endurance, compassion, and devotion to other human beings. The narrators cannot transcend the failures of a haunting past, and their task of reconstruction brings no lessons nor relief for their present. The attitude toward the untidiness of history that Le Vent's author would undoubtedly choose is the first one. However, death is not a question of escaping an unreconcilable past as in Quentin's case, but rather the only existing possibility, the only reality.

What meaning does the attempted restoration of the altarpiece yield to Le Vent's narrator? It arouses an angry and guilty revolt as Montès' story reminds him of the irremediable existence of suffering. Montès is the living incarnation of a suffering humanity who is the prey of the violent forces of nature. The lycée teacher reaches through Montès the view of a cyclical pattern of history. It is ever and ever again the same immutable decor, "l'antique et vénérable terre, le vieux monde souillé sans cesse ressurgissant à chaque aube dans son originelle virginité sous l'éclatante lumière, sans mystère, évident. . . . l'ordre réformé, indestructible, jusqu'au vent lui-même, de nouveau là" (V, 240-41)[53] There is no meaning to draw from the past, no help toward a revitalization of the present. Life is itself an absurd cycle in which all men were--are--will be victims. Any attempt at questioning its meaning remains a vain interrogation which is reflected in Montès' eyes bearing "cette expression à la fois suppliante, concentrée et incrédule" (V, 238). There is no hope of finding any answer because there exists no answer. The only relief, the only privilege of mortals, is Death.

An intoxicating odor of death permeates the two novels. Their respective titles evoke its pervading presence. The altarpiece retraces the lives of the dead. As to Absalom, his revolt ends in death. The narratives are riddled with morbid references. Words such as "funereal," "dead," "gloom," "grim," "dim," and "airless" recur in Absalom, Absalom! and are echoed by "funèbre," "mort," "obscurité," "morne," "gris," and "étouffant" in Le Vent. Death casts its shadow in the landscape, in the houses, and in the characters.

The town of Le Vent is desiccated, devastated by an arrid wind. Its waters are stagnant, its plane-trees are skeletal, its squares are dusty, its courts are moldy, it is in the process of putrefaction, it stinks "le moisi, le cadavre, la brique pourrie" (V, 112). The Mississippi air has the breath of a hellish fire, it is vulcanized, "furnace-breathed." The victorious dust is omnipresent and forbodes apocalypse.

The houses of Le Vent resemble burial vaults and their inhabitants bear the stamp of death. Black prevails in the office of the lawyer who is buried under dusty legal acts and serves as a depersonalized medium for a lifeless town bourgeoisie.

The farm of Montès' father exudes saltpeter and reminds us of catacombs. It hosts the incarnation of Lazarus with vulture features, his silent wife, a walking shadow with a waxy face, and their char-eyed daughter.

Montès' widowed uncle resides in a decayed mansion taken over by dust and rust. Montès' shabby hotel room opens onto the scrofulous wall of a barracks. The hero carries an emaciated face aged before its time, and a cadaverous body clothed with a mold-colored corduroy jacket. The café plunged into a sea-green darkness is peopled with mummies, these old withered card-players whose death-in-life resembles the slow endless consuming of their brown cigarette butts.

Miss Rosa's house, whose closed shutters forbid daylight, is coffin-smelling. The pale-faced spinster in her eternal mourning black emits a rank smell of old flesh and resembles "a crucified child" who grew up "in a household like an overpopulated mausoleum" (AA, 176). Her barren youth was spent behind doors in a deserted corridor and stopped dead forty-three years ago. Her hysterical language in the conditional--"I could have," "I might have," "there should," "that might have been"--betrays the bitter and passive spectator that life passes by.

Sutpen's Hundred is a "gray huge rotting deserted house" (AA, 187) with scaling walls. It has the "smell of desolation and decay as if the wood of which it was built were flesh" (AA, 366). Its owner has pale eyes and a face with "a dead impervious surface as of glazed clay" (AA, 33). Ellen, the butterfly, is dead-in-life and her vision of life is "like painted portraits hung in a vacuum . . . the originals of which had lived and died so long ago that their joys and griefs must now be forgotten even by the very boards on which they had strutted and postured and laughed and wept" (AA, 75).

Quentin and Shreve's Harvard room is icy-cold and tomblike, "a quality stale and static and moribund beyond mere vivid and living cold" (AA, 345). The corpse-like figure of Henry haunts Quentin's mind and the words of his revelation follow the pattern of a circle whose center is death.

Acts which are usually linked with vital functions are graveyard-smelling. Memory does not yield fond remembrances, instructive lessons, or the pleasure of a creative act but becomes an obsession. Sweat which would evoke heat and action is "triste, morne, refroidie" (V, 87). Sexuality is a sacrificial ritual performed in "a shadowy miasmic region something like the bitter purlieus of Styx" (AA, 69). In Le Vent the sexual act is a vain attempt at surviving oneself by denying one's mortal condition. Cécile gives her lifeless and virgin body to her fiancé as a supreme attempt at revolt and self-destruction.

Montès' virginity signifies his awareness of the futility and vanity of that "shadowy, obscene, brutal and ephemeral thrust and gush" by the male "blind and ancestral battering-ram." His only sexual thought is a post-mortem possession of Rose's body. His partner is death itself and brings him back into the ecstatic condition of unconscious foetal life. We find in Montès a wish for immobility, a will for death. Thus it is not surprising that the people he loves are Rose and her two daughters. Rose has the gait of a heavy, untroubled, and tireless brood-mare who is beyond the futile gallops of victory. She has the invincible hardness of the stone, "cette sorte de triomphe sur le temps" (V, 56).

Montès is fascinated by Thérésa's impenetrable mask of an Inca child mummy, eaten by the intolerable intensity of her two immense dark pupils resembling two pieces of coal. The little girl is beyond time. She has the intuitive knowledge of death and carries her burdening secret through life as if disembodied.

Montès yearns for death, this time when finally "le monde cesse lui-même de tourner, s'immobilise enfin." Until that time, man must carry along his cumbersome carcass finding an ephemeral relief in immobility or sleep "une sorte de mort" (V, 173), "the little death" (AA, 275). For Faulkner and Simon, life has a Macbethian resonance. It is an illusion, a tragic theatre play, "a walking shadow . . . a tale . . . full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing."

CONCLUSION

The resemblance between Le Vent and Absalom, Absalom! is undeniable. The most striking kinship resides in the style of the authors. Simon uses the same structural devices as the American novelist. To a story narrated by an omniscient author, he prefers the viewpoint of a first-person narrator. His baroque prose adopts a spiral movement circling around an idea, expanding it, comparing, deducing, and revising in an attempt to approximate a narrative truth. He employs the technique of suspension, although more timidly and awkwardly than his predecessor. The choice of tenses is wittingly calculated. The present participle resuscitates a scene from the past restoring its movement and its actuality in all its vividness and conveying a simultaneity into the present. The past tense calls forth juxtaposed tableaux of the past.

Simon has brilliantly applied the lessons learned from his reading of Faulkner and his prose is as complex as his model's. The reader of Faulkner and Simon is at first disconcerted by their hermetic style but soon finds the reward for his efforts. Beach expressed the frustrating but compulsive attraction of the reader to the Faulknerian prose in a very figurative way:

> Half the time we are swimming under water, holding our breath and straining our eyes to read off the meaning of submarine phenomena, unable to tell fact from figure, to fix the reference of pronouns, or distinguish between guess and certainty. From time to time we come to the surface, gasping, to breathe the air of concrete fact and recorded truth, only to go floundering again the next moment through crashing waves of doubt and speculation. We are forever on the point of giving up, throwing ourselves upon some reef and letting the ocean thunder by. But so powerful is the spell of this demon, so strong a hold he takes on our imagination and our curiosity, that we yield again our tired bodies to the flood, and go on swimming, gasping, floundering through the charted chaos of his narrative.[54]

The same feeling invades the reader of Simon. Once he has accepted the dive into the turbulent flow of his narrative, he finds an exhilarating fulfillment.

Simon has indeed learned from Faulkner "what writing could be." He works within a twentieth-century novelistic tradition and Faulkner was his primary inspirer in his search for form. But should critics fault Simon for finding in Faulkner an appropriate style to convey his sense of life? A statement from the creator of Yoknapatawpha County justifies Simon's borrowings:

> That the artist is--well, it's a little more than kleptomania--it's a little of kleptomania, but rather more of whatever it is that makes the magpie pick up everything or the packrat pick up anything that's loose. I think that's the way the writer goes through life, through books and through the actual living world too.[55]

This kleptomania is not a slavish imitation, but rather a personal recreation. Simon uses the stylistic tools taught by Faulkner to express his own personal views of the universe. The two authors are concerned with the same themes: memory, the recreation of the past, time, death, endurance. They are both "supremely obsessive writers"[56] as Duncan justly remarked, but their view of man and of his potential is radically different. They both portray man's desperate and compulsive effort to throw light on the past. They both realize that search for truth ends in partial knowledge, fragmentation, and subjective interpretations. They both present an image of an enchained man whose life is paralyzed by a number of unleashed forces and darkened by the omnipresent shadow of death. But it would be unjust to accuse Simon of stealing these themes from Faulkner. They are the eternal themes that forever puzzle and fascinate all men and lead them into their incessant exploration.

Faulkner's view is profoundly ethical. Man's failure is the expiation of his sin. It is originated by the loss of moral principles. Man must face the sins of the past, present, and future, in order to survive them. He must conquer the obscure forces endangering his humanity. He must endure, which is a victory in itself and leads to positive and creative action. Only at this expense will man create a new humanity, will he prevail.

Simon does not want to convey any philosophical or moral message. There is no sense of sin in his novel. He only strives to portray his own anguishing experience of life: nothingness. History is unreadable. It is the perpetual and absurd rerun of an incoherent film. It is the disordered, puzzling, and undecipherable print of a torn newspaper. Man is a victimized puppet, condemned to a slow agony. His suffering is not the expiation of a sin and there is no possibility of redemption in an absurd and chaotic life. The novel ends on a tragic note: death is the only reality and the sole privilege of man. Between the minute of his violent expulsion into the chaos of life and the moment of his final liberation, man can only endure. But it is not Faulkner's victorious endurance. It has the bitter taste of an inflicted agony.

Simon is the aesthetic child of Faulkner, but his personal vision of the world places him beyond mere pastiche. He has succeeded in putting into practice Montaigne's advice for a proper education: the bees plunder the flowers but afterward they make of them honey, which is all theirs. Simon has profited from Faulkner's pollination and has blended this pollen to make a work that is his own honey.

NOTES

NOTES

[1] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Selected Essays, new ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), p. 4.

[2] Robert Kanters, "La Difficulté d'être romancier...," La Table Ronde, 81 (Sept. 1954), 121. Also "Avez vous lu Simon?" Le Figaro Littéraire, 12 May 1962, p. 18.

[3] Wilbur M. Frohock, "Continuities in the New Novel," Style and Temper: Studies in French Fiction, 1925-1960 (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. 123.

[4] Diane R. Leonard, "Simon's L'Herbe: Beyond Sound and Fury," French-American Review, 1 (Winter 1976), 13-30.

[5] Alistair B. Duncan, "Claude Simon and William Faulkner," Forum for Modern Lauguage Studies, 9 (July 1973), 235-52.

[6] Le Tricheur (1945) and La Corde Raide (1947) originally published by Les Editions du Sagittaire. Gulliver (1952) and Le Sacre du printemps (1954) published by Calmann-Lévy. See Duncan, pp. 235-37, for a survey of the Faulknerian elements in the early novels.

[7] Malcolm Cowley, The Faulkner-Cowley File: Letters and Memories, 1944-1962 (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 24.

[8] André Bourin, "Techniciens du roman: Claude Simon," Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 29 Dec. 1960, p. 4.

[9] Henry Nash Smith, Lion in the Garden, eds. J. B. Meriwether and M. Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 30-31.

[10] "that incomprehensible spell he worked on people without his knowing it, that bewilderment, that exasperation" (W, 111). All translations of the longer quotes from Le Vent are set in notes and are drawn from Richard Howard's translation: The Wind (New York: Braziller, 1959), abbreviated as W. All page references to Le Vent and Absalom, Absalom! appear in the text with the following abbreviations: V and AA.

[11] "the geometrical point, that nerve center at which the town chronicle converged and radiated too (shouted from booth to booth in the intoxicating odor of perfumes and the electric hum of the dryers)" (*W*, 222).

[12] Léon S. Roudiez, "Claude Simon," *French Fiction Today: A New Direction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1972), p. 161.

[13] "his fundamental inaptitude for being aware of life, things, events except by the intermediary of his senses, his heart" (*W*, 153).

[14] "that fragmentary, incomplete knowledge consisting of an accretion of sudden images (and those only partially apprehended by the sense of sight) or an accumulation of words (themselves poorly grasped) or a welter of generally ill-defined sensations, and everything--words, images, sensations--vague, full of gaps, blanks that the imagination and an approximative logic tried to remedy by a series of risky deductions" (*W*, 10).

[15] "And he told me how he had stayed there, saying nothing, watching the last store that was still lighted on the other side of the square, startling in the darkness, too far away for him to be able to hear, to grasp anything but that mute fraction of life inscribed in the luminous rectangle of the shopwindow where he could see first of all the shop itself, the raw green of the vegetables, the lettuces in crates, the heavy cluster of bananas, the onions, the heaped-up cubes of yellow soap, and the enormous white refrigerator with a blue birdcage on top, and behind it a curtain with dark-red stripes, washed so often that the red had faded and the white background was wine-pink now, and showing behind the curtain was another curtain, this one sky-blue, and between the two curtains was a woman in a blue dress holding a little red car that the child on her lap was trying to catch hold of, and to the right was a round table covered with a yellowish oilcloth and sitting behind it was another woman wearing a purple sweater and an apple-green blouse" (W, 104).

[16] "The low, dark-yellow sun shone almost horizontally into the room, projected the mottled spot slowly turning from lemon to chrome, then from chrome to orange" (*W*, 89).

[17] *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958*, F. L. Gwynn and J. L. Blotner, eds. (New York: Vintage, 1965), p. 253.

[18] "But I didn't need to have him tell me about that. It was as if I could see it for myself" (*W*, 245).

[19] Richard Forrer, "Absalom, Absalom!: Story-telling as a Mode of Transcendence," Southern Literary Journal, 9 (Fall 1976), 31-32.

[20] Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 429-436.

[21] The Faulkner-Cowley File, p. 14.

[22] Hubert Juin, "Les Secrets d'un romancier," Les Lettres Françaises, 844 (Oct. 1960), 5.

[23] Michael Millgate, The Achievement of William Faulkner (New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 164.

[24] Claude Simon, Preface to Orion Aveugle (Genève: Skira, 1970).

[25] "stripped, destitute, fleshless, and even more than fleshless, disincarnated, reduced to his most elemental expression, not even his skeleton, not even a few bones: a rusty nail, a twig, nothing" (W, 80).

[26] Michel Gresset, "La Figure que fait l'oeuvre de Faulkner," Publication de la Société des Annales du Centre Universitaire Méditerranéen, 23 (Nice, 1970), 95.

[27] Walter J. Slatoff, "The Edge of Order: The Pattern of Faulkner's Rhetoric," William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, F. J. Hoffman and O. W. Vickery, eds. (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1960), p. 177.

[28] John Fletcher, "Claude Simon and the Memory Enigma," New Directions in Literature (London: Calder & Boyars, 1968), p. 121.

[29] Conrad Aiken, "William Faulkner: The Novel as Form," Three Decades of Criticism, p. 138.

[30] Joseph W. Beach, "William Faulkner: Virtuoso," American Fiction: 1920-1940 (New York: Russell, 1960), pp. 167-68.

[31] "It's one thing when a whore of a waitress like that Rose tries to get her hooks into him, that was bound to happen, but when a girl compromises herself like . . ." (W, 14).

[32] Duncan, p. 244.

[33] Madeleine Chapsal, "Claude Simon: Il n'y a pas d'art réaliste," La Quinzaine Littéraire, 15-30 Dec. 1967.

[34] "and Montès standing, watching the scene, and suddenly everything stopping, immobilized, the woman, the waitress, coming in again by the rear door, quickly crossing the room towards the man, taking the child out of his arms, thrusting two fingers into the open mouth, taking them out again almost at once, throwing something away, tearing the sticky cake out of the little hand and throwing it away too, quickly wiping her fingers on her apron, and only then saying: "Have you gone crazy? Can't you see she's choking?" (W, 50).

[35] "as if each gesture immediately released the next, or rather as if the end of each gesture were already the beginning of the next" (W, 200).

[36] Robert H. Zoellner, "Faulkner's Prose Style in Absalom, Absalom!," American Literature, 30 (Jan. 59), 492.

[37] Jean-Luc Seylaz, "Du Vent à La Route des Flandres: la conquête d'une forme romanesque," Revue des Lettres Modernes, 94-99 (1964), 227-28.

[38] Claude Mauriac, "Claude Simon," L'Alittérature contemporaine (Paris: Albin Michel, 1969), p. 295.

[39] "that was what he himself had just lived through: that incoherence, that brutal, apparently absurd juxtaposition of sensations, faces, words, actions. Like a story with the syntax--subject, predicate, object--missing from every sentence. Like what any newspaper article becomes (the bleak monotonous grayish alignment of tiny characters which all the world's anguish and action is reduced to) when your eyes happen to notice the torn page wrapped around a bunch of leeks, and then, by the magic of a few truncated, incomplete lines, life recovers its superb and arrogant independence, becomes again that disordered abundance without beginning or end or order, the words fresh again, freed of syntax, that stale arrangement, that all-purpose cement" (W, 184).

[40] "he first arrived, appearing among us so unexpectedly, like a pebble in fact, his only baggage that camera case he always kept hanging around his neck, his bicycle, and an old strapped valise dating back to at least the beginning of the century and probably containing nothing more than a few handkerchiefs and socks and three or four grayish flannel shirts faded from so many washings, the collars and cuffs frayed, and finally an enormous canvas envelope that I saw once in his room, tied up with string and straining to hold together a jumble of old letters, negatives, and yellowing official papers that apparently constituted the whole of his fortune" (W, 12).

[41] "the gale also contributed to the tacit conspiracy of men and elements that seemed to have brought him, driven him, forced him back to where he had come from" (W, 28).

[42] Stuart W. Sykes, "Mise en Abyme in the Novels of Claude Simon," Forum for Modern Language Studies, 9 (Oct. 1973), 335.

[43] Faulkner in the University, p. 35.

[44] Faulkner in the University, p. 39.

[45] "that calm obstinacy in the face of the impossible and the unrealizable: in a word, his insolent defiance" (W, 21), "that kind of peaceful relentlessness, that calm obstinacy which appeared to invest or rather to possess him, making him act in excess of or even in contradiction to his own will, his own desires" (W, 27).

[46] The Faulkner-Cowley File, p. 15.

[47] Janine Parot, "Claude Simon part en guerre contre la 'signification,'" Les Lettres Françaises, 19-25 Jan. 1961.

[48] "The Nobel Prize and After: The Stockholm Address," Three Decades of Criticism, p. 348.

[49] "then he noticed the sun had moved and was shining through the window onto the wall opposite: first a vague beam paler than the wall, then a golden fringe, then a thick triangle growing longer, stronger, gradually advancing in the slow empty afternoon, able to sense, he told me, the time, the eternal beginning, the eternal movement of inert insensible matter turning in its infinite shifting positions with that overpowering and implacable deliberation, the promise of slow torture, slow agony" (W, 209).

[50] Faulkner in the University, p. 246.

[51] Jean Stein, "William Faulkner: an Interview," Three Decades of Criticism, p. 82.

[52] Faulkner in the University, p. 139.

[53] "the ancient and venerable earth, the old ceaselessly befouled world reborn with every dawn in primal virginity, unmysterious beneath the dazzling light, evident. . . . everything beginning all over again, indestructible, even the wind itself beginning again" (W, 253-54).

[54] Beach, p. 160.

[55] Faulkner in the University, p. 203.

[56] Duncan, p. 250.

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