The Journey Within:
Empathy and Ontology in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*
and
Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*

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ABSTRACT

"The Journey Within" deals with how the receiver (reader/viewer) engages with the novel and the film. The thesis primarily focuses on Faulkner's novel, incorporating *Persona* largely as a means by which to illustrate the more carefully concealed reader-engagement strategies in *Absalom, Absalom!* Starting with a review of Faulkner criticism that opens itself up to this inquiry, the thesis leads into a detail study of the engagement strategies used to foster identification, alignment, sympathy, and empathy among receivers. Employing Umberto Eco's criticism involving "Model Readers" who "actualize" texts, as well as other reader and viewer response theory, I demonstrate that certain receivers experience a specific, heightened engagement with the work. This "Model" receiver restructures her ideologies to accord with what the work expects from her. Ultimately, this particular engagement leads to ontological participation in the work among its receivers. Martin Heidegger's phenomenological investigation, *Being and Time*, helps illustrate this ontological participation.

ABSTRACT (French)

"The Journey Within" examine l'engagement du receveur "lecteur" avec le roman et le cinéma. Cette thèse emprunte *Absalom, Absalom!* de Faulkner, par le biais de *Persona,* comme moyen d'illustrer l'engagement dissimulé du lecteur que l'on retrouve dans l'œuvre de Bergman. L'étude des strategies d'engagement utilisée pour élucider d'identification, alignement, sympathie et empathie du lecteur se fait par l'entremise d'une revue préliminaire de l'analyse critique de Faulkner. L'auteur de cette thèse démontre que certains receveur "lecteur" éprouvent une expérience prononcée avec l'œuvre. Ici, on emprunte, entre autres, l'analyse critique qu'incorpore Umberto Eco avec le concept de "Model Reader" qui actualise les textes et théories de réponse. Bientôt, on aperçoit le "Model Receiver" qui restructure ses idéologies en accord avec l'engagement que l'œuvre impose. Enfin, *Being and Time* l'œuvre d'investigation phénoménologique de Martin Heidegger, illustre cette forme d'engagement qui mène à une participation ontologique.

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The Journey Within:

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Engagement with a work of art is a journey. But a journey within what, exactly? From which point do we begin our journey? If we journey inward, where do we arrive? Or, perhaps more accurately: do we arrive? That is: if there is a destination, a center, what is it? We know that not every work of art draws us in, but which ones do and why? *Absalom, Absalom!*, by William Faulkner, and *Persona*, by Ingmar Bergman, successfully draw the audience into the fictional space. They achieve this by guiding the spectator through a phenomenological process that fosters heightened engagement with the work. While not all audiences will experience the fictions in the same way, certain audience members whom Umberto Eco might refer to as "Model Readers[/Viewers]" will engage with the fiction by becoming an essential aspect of its ontology. A different experience of reading/viewing the fiction is not necessarily less valuable or meaningful. It simply tends toward the interpretive (in the literary sense), leading the audience member to inscribe *answers* onto a fiction characterized by *questions* – questions about the audience, the possibility of transcendence, and, perhaps most importantly, the construct.

Many of the strategies Faulkner and Bergman employ are similar. However, Bergman's strategies, especially those involving some type of transition, are easier to recognize for two primary reasons. First, we typically register transitions (i.e., from one place and time to another) faster when viewing a film than when reading text. Of course, this concept precedes the adage, and if "a picture says a thousand words" then a thousand words might be just what it takes to reveal the characteristics and boundaries of new places and times in text. In order to embrace the

effect of a transition in a text (similar to a "cut" in a film), the reader must continue reading at least enough to know where the "narration"[1] has led the text. Second, Bergman's transitions are far more overt than Faulkner's because they are less susceptible to instant reinterpretation by the audience. We are more likely to accept what we see (on the screen) as "actual" or "real" than what we read in a novel. When reading a text, we tend to work out epistemologically irrational events and incidents by relegating them to the metaphorical or psychological.[2] Therefore, the novelist must adhere to strategies subtle enough to prevent this type of reading if he wishes to present his readers with events that are rationally impossible in their world outside of the text. As a result, the reader might not immediately recognize this subtle transition and instead register it on a subconscious level. This way, the effect of the transition has been achieved, but the tendency to interpret it as a representation of a character's psychological transition or as a metaphorical representation of something altogether different has been evaded.

By no means am I implying that we do not metaphorize film or filmic images. I simply suggest that because of the way we are accustomed to processing what we *see*, we are slightly less likely to refute the image – consciously or subconsciously – as a representation of something real. This is partly because the thing presented in the film is a *result* of the thing itself as it actually exists in our world pre-filmically. Referring to Berman's *The Silence*, Susan Sontag writes:

> Ingmar Bergman may have meant the tank rumbling down the
>
> empty night street . . . as a phallic symbol. But if he did, it was a
>
> foolish thought. ('Never trust the teller, trust the tale,' said

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[1] See Chapter Two.
[2] When reading 18th century literature, we typically relegate these incidents to the metaphysical, as was customary at the time it was written.

Lawrence.) Taken as a brute object, as an immediate sensory

equivalent for the mysterious abrupt armored happenings going on

inside the hotel, that sequence with the tank is the most striking

moment in the film. Those who reach for a Freudian interpretation

of the tank are only expressing their lack of response to what is

there on the screen. (*Against Interpretation* 9-10)

In this spirit, I suggest that we are more likely to behave in this manner when viewing a film

than when reading a text. This is partly because we are less inclined to re-interpret images due

to the direct relationship between the thing represented and the thing it represents. On the other

hand, when an author such as Faulkner writes "dog," he likely has an image of what the "dog"

looks like in his mind. However, when we envision the dog, we will have our own image.

There is no direct correlation between the thing represented (Faulkner's dog) and the thing itself.

The signifier has no real entity which results in representation. As abrupt textual transitions are

subject to the same conditions, the reader might align her interpretation of them with her world

outside of the text. *Absalom's* transitional subtlety prevents the reader from rejecting transitions

too quickly, or, worse, from metaphorizing them.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Persona*, Faulkner and Bergman prevent the "model"

audience member from favoring a metaphorical or psychological interpretation of their internal

"stories" by taking their audiences through a conditioning process. The process gradually

heightens audience engagement with the fiction by fostering a series of different types of

responses to characters and events in the text. Initially, the audience engages with individual

aspects of the fiction through responses such as *identification* with characters, *sympathy*,

empathy for characters and their experiences, and so on. In both the novel and the film, these

responses dominate approximately the first half of the fiction. Though responses to the

construct as a whole develop on a relatively subconscious level in the first half of the fiction,

these responses become more dominant in the second half. This is because the "conditioning

process" leads to a hermeneutic loop the "model" reader/viewer will complete. Ultimately, the

reader/viewer discovers that everything presented from a pivotal point forward is much the same

as what has been presented from the start. She simply receives it in a new a different way

largely because it is *known, understood, "uncovered."*[3]

The Design

"The Journey Within" is divided into four chapters. In **Chapter One**, I review some

earlier Faulkner criticism that opens itself up to the questions central to this project. Each

analysis I address in Chapter One leads to the possibility of the next and that to the next and so

on, until the prevailing ambiguities provide the origin of my analysis. Through the explications

in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, I hope to foreground and illuminate concepts about

Faulknerian self-reflexivity and indeterminacy his earlier critics detected. My emphasis is less

on these characteristics themselves than on the way they influence our experience of the fiction.

In **Chapter Two**, I focus on several types of responses we have to *Absalom* and *Persona*.

Persona serves primarily to illuminate modes of engagement that might be less obvious in

Absalom. I suggest that each "level" of engagement represents part of a process which, once

completed, will foster an engagement not with individual characters or events, but rather with the

entire novel/film as a whole entity ("stories," fiction, construct, apparatus, pages, letters, etc.). In

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[3] *See* Chapters Three and Four

this chapter, however, I concentrate only on our progression from *identification* with characters to *empathy* with characters and events. By "empathy with events," I mean that we have a sense of experiencing these events first-hand through our empathy for the characters who endure them in the text. I will also describe the type of imagination we employ in order to produce this response. Though I refer to it as a *progression* from one mode of engagement to the next, I will demonstrate that the progression is not necessarily linear. I place great emphasis on the fact that the novel/film sufficiently and frequently acknowledges our position outside of the construct (in the world outside the fiction). By so doing, it prevents us from rejecting its strategies used to draw us into the fiction. I argue that experiencing these different modes of engagement conditions us to recognize and restructure the ideological overcoding we have brought to the fiction.

Some of the new ideologies we adopt, how we came to adopt them, and their origins are the focus of **Chapter Three**. This chapter centers primarily on *Persona*, as earlier criticism of the film provides the platform from which these ideologies spring. Again, they are almost identical to those we formulate through the conditioning process instituted in *Absalom*. Chapter three focuses on *Persona* not only because Bergman's strategies for originating new ideologies are more obvious than Faulkner's, but also because the critical terminology and methodology Bergman critics use is readily applicable to *Absalom*, whereas the reverse is not necessarily true.

As I intend to demonstrate, these new ideologies apply to a world that is neither the world of the fiction nor the world outside of the fiction (the world of everyday experience). Instead, the ideologies affect a world projected between the two. I employ concepts and terminology from Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* to illuminate some of the propositions set forth in this chapter. In the following chapter, I will place even greater significance on these concepts. They

help explicate how and why we, as a concerned and critical audience, relate to and engage with these very particular types of fiction in a rich and peculiar way.

In **Chapter Four**, I perform an ontological investigation of the world between us and the fiction, as well as how we comport ourselves toward it. This world contains three primary aspects: the fiction, the characters within the fiction, and the audience members that receive the fiction through the construct. Of course we, as the audience members (or "receivers"), inject this world with aspects of our own world of experience outside the text. As the world in which we live, our world of everyday experience has helped provide us with the tools we need to receive the fiction. When reading this chapter, it is especially important to remember that the type of engagement we experience at this point is a product of the long and delicate process (described in Chapters Two and Three) we undergo as we receive the fiction.

This process involves a certain amount of active participation in the "actualization" of the work.[4] It also, however, involves a certain passivity through which we resist the temptation to write our own version of the "story" onto the narratives provided by the novel/film. Maintaining this balance, we will gradually enter *into* the world projected between ourselves and the fiction. Frequently using Heideggerian terminology, I will show that once we fully accept and employ the ideologies of the world projected between ourselves and the fiction, we enter into it. Inside that world, we utilize our intuitive ability to discover its boundaries and articulate its meaning. At this point, the world then projects a representation of itself, disclosing itself to itself and, by extension, *to us* as aspects of that world. We then find ourselves articulating the questions it asks about its being. We are able to articulate them partly because of the conditioning process we have undergone and partly because of what we, as beings who question our *own* being, have

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[4] *See* Chapters Two and Three

brought to the fiction. By participating in its ontological questionings, we experience the most

intimate level of engagement with the fiction. While not all *Persona* viewers or *Absalom* readers

will engage with the work of art on this level, I argue that those who do can achieve the richest

and most intimate relationship with the work.

CHAPTER ONE

Faulkner Criticism: Opening up the Discussion

Early Faulkner criticism edges toward a self-referential interpretation of his fiction, which is a component of its ontology. Many Faulknerian texts, and in particular *Absalom, Absalom!*, are highly self-referential; they focus the construction and artificial nature *of* the work of art *within* the work of art. They also draw attention to the similarities between characters and readers, and the significant universality of their experience. In the reader's case, this "experience" at the moment is, of course, reading. Texts such as *Absalom, Absalom!* also rely on ontological rather than epistemological means to project worlds the characteristics of which the reader helps define. Because Faulkner has historically been considered a modernist[5], his critics have not always focused on these characteristics of his work largely because they came into focus during the period of what is generally considered postmodern criticism. As Frederic Jameson notes, however, postmodernism is not at all new but is abundantly characterized by modernist features (Jameson "Postmodernism and Consumer Society"16-17). Jameson focuses on the break between modernism and postmodernism as one that occurred when the position of art shifted within society.[6] I suggest that *Absalom, Absalom!* is among those novels that do what many "postmodern" texts do despite the fact that it was published before this shift occurred. Earlier interpretations of Faulkner's oeuvre acknowledge characteristics of his work that are central to my argument. Moreover, they gesture toward the types of responses these

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[5] Malcolm Bradbury, for example, claims that "Virginia Woolf's is probably the name we would next draw forth to show that English fiction . . . had a modernist phase. We have now come to take her as the imaginative contemporary of the great European and American modernists—Proust, Mann, Joyce, Faulkner" (Bradbury 121).
[6] Jameson also calls attention to the typically "perpetual present" of postmodern fiction. Carolyn Porter describes the narrative in *Light in August* as a "continually moving present" (Porter 253).

characteristics foster. Because of this, earlier analyses unintentionally begin to open Faulknerian criticism up to the realm of reader-engagement upon which I focus – one that involves the reader's ontological participation in the fiction.

Faulkner is typically considered one of the high modernists of the early to mid-twentieth century, so the attributes of his work upon which his earlier critics focused were like those of other modernists such as Joyce, Hemingway, and Woolf. Faulkner's work is certainly characterized by modernist aesthetics: equivocal perspectives of time and space; "ironic juxtapositions of past and present; (Bradbury 121)" use of the stream-of-consciousness technique; first person perspectives of the "grand narrative" in which various historical moments and influences infiltrate immediate experience; an emphasis on symbolism; and, especially in Faulkner's case, doubtful narrative authority (usually involving several narrators). Through close examination of these characteristics, I will demonstrate that they serve to disorient the reader, rendering her appropriately conditioned to engage in the novel in a particular way.

Early criticism increasingly betrays an awareness that Faulkner's strategies are unlike those of many of his contemporary "modernist" writers. Conrad Aiken once claimed that Faulkner's work demands that his readers be patient and read on "until the dropping into place of every last syllable" (Aiken 142). This relatively reductive reading overlooks the Faulknerian strategies, such as sustained indeterminacy, that foster the highest level of engagement with the text. Hugh Kenner seems to progress beyond this type of narrow reading in his article "Faulkner and Joyce," in which he addresses the differences in their texts. With a nod toward the ontological dominant in Faulkner's work, Kenner suggests that "By the management of rhythm and diction alone three different narrators can be so clearly distinguished the path from one to another is like transit *to another planet*" (my emphasis, Kenner 24). Further, he draws attention

to what I perceive as one of the most important differences between other "high modernist" texts and Faulkner's texts. Kenner writes:

> Unlike the stream-of-consciousness pages of *Ulysses*, which supply printed notation for thoughts that are being transacted in a specified time and place, the three 'monologues' that make up three-quarters of *The Sound and the Fury* employ the stream-of-consciousness convention as a way to construct a book that is finally enacted only in the reader's mind, discarding Joyce's convention that inner speech is necessarily spoken somewhere on some occasion, and making maximum use of Joyce's occasional freedom to supply more words than a silent mind would have framed. (Kenner 29)

With these two observations, Kenner begins to foreground the characteristics of Faulkner's work that draw the reader into the text at the most primordial levels. He suggests that the reader is responsible for thinking some of the unwritten words in the text – for completing the indeterminate narrative. However, as he continues, he claims that Faulkner relies on a reader who is "willing to wait, willing to trust the book to declare itself" (Kenner 30). At this point, Kenner's concept of Faulknerian indeterminacy resists its own impetus to move out beyond a typically modernist reading. It suggests that Faulkner's text will ultimately be neatly concluded in a well-explained narrative. His barely perceptible hesitation seems an attempt to prevent his reading from seeming too outlandish and therefore susceptible to rejection by his contemporaries. In fact, novels such as *Absalom, Absalom!* do not necessarily "declare" themselves but remain vague and oblique so that only the apt reader will recognize the forms, images, and "world(s)" projected in the novel. Faulkner's talent originates partly in his steadfast resolve to supply his readers with only impressions, trusting they are sufficiently equipped to write their own version

of the story – that version which Faulkner claimed might be the "truth." Even this potentially

"true" narrative, however, remains unclear. It descends upon the reader like a snowfall through

which she conceives only muted sounds and blurred visions.

Like Hugh Kenner, Malcolm Cowley initially examined Faulknerian texts from a

typically "modernist" perspective. Later, however, he began to question this interpretation. In

Faulkner, Modernism, and Film, Cowley admits:

> When I was reading *Absalom, Absalom!* for a second time, I
>
> puzzled over that question of emblematic meanings and I wrote to
>
> Faulkner for elucidation: "How much of the symbolism . . . is
>
> intentional, deliberate?" (Cowley 6)

Cowley then included a quotation from one of his earlier critiques of the novel. The quotation

reveals that Cowley's primary focus in his earlier reading was one of symbolic parallelism

between the "characters and incidents" (6) in Faulknerian texts and the "real" social situation out

of which they arose. Faulkner's response supports the claim that the exclusion of consistently

specific "real-world" significations in *Absalom* is essential to his reader-response strategy:

> I accept gratefully all your implications, even though I didn't carry
>
> them consciously and simultaneously into the writing of it. But I
>
> don't believe it would have been necessary to carry them or even to
>
> have known their analogous derivation, to have had them in the
>
> story.[7] (Cowley 7)

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[7] When asked about one of his films, Bergman once responded, "Exactly what happened and why I don't know" (*Encountering Characters* 186-7).

By extension, Faulkner suggests here that his novel does not evolve out of mimesis, rather it "abrupts" "like a thunderclap"[8] onto the page out of an originary, artistic subconscious – the space in which the true artifice resides. Faulkner's confidence in the power of his subconscious to deliver a story most engaging to his readers is evident in both this response to Cowley and his work. To have created characters and incidents with precise analogous derivations in the "real" world would, in fact, only detract from his work and its impact on the reader.[9] *Absalom* is neither about the reader's (or Faulkner's) world outside of the text, nor about the significations within it, but about the world projected from the combination of these.

Cowley's interpretation of Faulkner's work begins, at length, to take the shape of my own. I suggest that Faulkner relies only partly on natural, written language to shape a fictional world out of a series of intertwined narratives. Equally as important to the novel is the world that gradually takes shape between the reader and *Absalom* without natural language. The strategies Faulkner uses to draw the reader into this world will be the focus of Chapters Two and Three. For the moment, Cowley's analysis helps illustrate the end rather than the means. More importantly, his analysis proves that the end was recognized before literary criticism employed the terminology critics currently use to describe the means. Though Cowley does not clarify specific strategies that foster reader-response, his essay implies the actualizing function of the reader based partly in the reader's pre-existing ideologies. Cowley recognizes that these ideologies are not necessarily registered consciously but are more often vague, pre-cognitive. He claims that Faulkner's writing "appeals to feelings and patterns existing in [the reader's] mind below the level of conscious thinking" (Cowley "Magic in Faulkner" 15). He terms these pre-

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[8] From *Absalom*.
[9] I explain and expand this claim in Chapters Three and Four.

existing patterns "prelogical patterns of feeling," echoing Eco's concept of preexisting patterns of thought, which I will discuss at length in Chapter Two.[10]

Walter Slatoff's analyses illustrate the futility of using "prelogical patterns of feeling" to give meaning to Faulknerian texts. Addressing Faulknerian indeterminacy in his book, *Quest for Failure*, Slatoff focuses on the common perception that Faulkner's texts remain in flux, in a state of suspension through relationships of "tension and unresolved conflict" (Slatoff 135). He also admits that the texts are "not resolvable in rational terms," due largely to their indeterminacy. If this is true, is it not possible that there is some purpose for encouraging a reader to use irrational, "notlanguage" to comprehend unresolution? While Slatoff questions whether "the events we have witnessed are part of a tragic design or merely some grim and pointless cosmic joke," I think he is missing the point (Slatoff 136). Unresolution in novels such as *Absalom* is less about a lack of "meaningfulness or significance" than it is about process – about the way Faulkner achieves unresolution (136). The most important aspect of the process is its effect on the reader. Slatoff concludes that "No amount of thought or analysis can move us beyond the suspension of opposed elements" (137). While I disagree with his conclusion, his close examination of Faulknerian indeterminacy is important because it helped foster later criticism aimed at disclosing the purpose of that indeterminacy.

Twenty years after the publication of *Quest for Failure*, Carolyn Porter revisits these concepts in her book *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner*. Calling attention to narrative indeterminacy, Porter turns initially to Slatoff's analysis. She writes: "The options available to the reader are apparently exhausted

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[10] Also Jameson: "So it is that when common sense predominates and characterizes our normal everyday mental atmosphere, dialectical thinking presents itself as the perversely hairsplitting, as the overelaborate and the oversubtle, reminding us that the

by Walter Slatoff's frank admission . . . [that] Faulkner couldn't bring himself to work it all out" (Porter 242). Rejecting this explanation, Porter claims instead that she "would agree with Cleanth Brooks's staunch insistence that the novel forms a coherent whole" (242). The many, varied and often incompatible narratives presented in the novel are part of Faulkner's design. She suggests that "the novel's strategy is designed to block both subjective and objective escape hatches from history as the stream of event," as "each story necessitates another, until plot lines seem to spread out indefinitely" (243). Wolfgang Iser espouses the following position about reader response that relates specifically to novels such as *Absalom* characterized by various divergent narratives:

> When [schematized views] touch, the degree of connection is
>
> usually not stated but has to be inferred. Sometimes the sequence
>
> of views has the appearance of being dissevered, resembling a
>
> cutting technique. The most frequent application of this device
>
> occurs where several plot threads run simultaneously but must be
>
> dealt with one after the other. (Iser 9)

This technique naturally increases the reader's level of engagement substantially as she is forced to actively participate in "filling the gaps," so to speak, in the text. Moreover, she will at least subconsciously develop hypotheses about *why* the text moves about from one place and time to another. Ideally, she will allow herself to move freely between plot threads during the first reading without flipping back and forth through the novel in an attempt to order a series of linear plot lines. By bringing these four concepts together (Porter, Brooks, Slatoff, Iser), we can infer that for the "stream of events" to be "continuous," the reader must discover and characterize the

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simple is in reality only *a simplification,* and that the self-evident draws its for from *hosts of buried presuppositions*" (my

world that erupts from between them. How does she achieve this? By reseeing, in her mind's eye, the spaces between the "cuts," i.e., between the plot lines that seem to spread out indefinitely. Eventually, she will discern the novel's purpose for cutting at that particular point in time.

The reader's pre-existing "patterns of feeling" sometimes inform natural language in the text and help give meaning to passages that would otherwise seem incomplete and even senseless. At other times, the reader must intuitively recognize that her pre-existing patterns of feeling are incompatible with the message suggested by the text. In this case, an apt reader will discard her pre-existing ideologies and make room for those she perceives rising up out of the novel. The reader essentially reevaluates the novel on terms previously unnatural to her. Faulkner was intensely interested in the concept of seeing and then reseeing events and images in the world (outside or inside of fiction). In many of his novels, his reader-response strategies involve presenting a narrative through a number of varied perspectives, conditioning the reader to "resee" them. This strategy ultimately causes the reader to recognize the validity of each different perspective, as well as the purpose for presenting them as a "coherent whole."

David Mintner addresses Faulkner's interest in seeing and reseeing in his biographical text *William Faulkner: His Life and his Work*. In the biography, Mintner calls attention to Thomas Sutpen's comments pertaining to the plantation at which he was told by a "balloon face[d] . . . nigger" (*Absalom, Absalom!* 187) to enter the plantation owner's home through the back door. Sutpen explains to Quentin's Grandfather that he experienced the two years his family had lived there:

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emphasis, "Towards Dialictical Criticism" 308).

like when you pass through a room fast and look at all the objects

in it and you turn and go back through the room again and look at

all the objects from the other side and you find out you had never

seen them before, rushing back through those two years and seeing

a dozen things that had happened and he hadn't even seen them

before. (*Absalom* 186)

This highly self-referential passage describes not only Sutpen's experience, but also the

anticipated experience of the "Model Reader" (Eco 7). Varying narrative accounts of the events

in Sutpen's life have conditioned the reader to place emphasis on all accounts but Sutpen's own.

Now, on first hearing the story from the perspective of the man himself,[11] the reader recognizes

the self-referentiality of the passage. The reader at least subconsciously realizes that this passage

encourages her to resee the figures, images, and events projected in *Absalom*. Not necessarily by

rereading the book, but by reseeing them in her mind, the images will crystallize.[12] Through this

passage to which Mintner draws attention, Faulkner encourages the reader to acknowledge the

following: if she returns to the book, she may in fact see new images. Though they were there in

the text, they were covered in a fog of her own preconceptions and futile epistemological

explanations.[13]

Mintner suggests not only that this passage is self-referential, but also that it reflects the

way in which Faulkner experienced the process of writing the novel: "In this book, in which

writing became his way of rereading and reseeing, he began forcing his readers to practice

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[11] Though this account comes down into the natural language of the novel through generations of multi-layered voices and thereby incorporates the tones and inflections of the storytellers.

[12] "It is, of course, thought to the second power: an intensification of the thought processes such that a renewal of light washes over the object of their exasperation, as though in the midst of its immediate perplexities the mind had attempted, by willpower, by fiat, to lift itself mightily up by its own bootstraps" (Jameson, "Towards Dialectical Criticism," 307).

[13] *See* Chapter Two.

reseeing and rereading" (Mintner 21-2). This concept will become especially significant when we consider the novel and our reception of it as rising up out of our subconscious. I investigate how the parallels of Faulkner's experience (of writing) and ours (of reading) are fundamentally phenomenological.[14]

Mintner's biography is one among many later Faulkner critiques that call attention to its self-referentiality. Porter's analysis (above) ultimately focuses on self-referential passages in Faulkner's work, as well. For example, she claims that *Absalom* "may be said to be about the relationship not only between Quentin Compson and Thomas Sutpen, but also between the reader and the novel" (260). She quotes Mr. Compson:

> It's just incredible . . . It just does not explain and we are not supposed to
>
> know . . . You reread, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you
>
> have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation . . . and again nothing
>
> happens" . . . Faulkner's strategy works against not the inherent
>
> temporality of narrative, but the inherent spatiality of the book—that
>
> spatiality which endows the reader with the freedom to "reread, tedious
>
> and intent, poring" over pages which he can turn backward as well as
>
> forward. (Porter 260)

She emphasizes the fact that the reader is an "emblematic figure of detachment from the 'real' world" and is therefore a "participant in the story he reads," a protagonist who

> sits for an entire evening, and for three chapters, "quite still, facing
>
> the table, his hand on either side of the open text book . . . his face
>
> lowered a little, brooding." (Porter 260)

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[14] Neither writer nor reader knows in advance exactly where his or her project will lead.

Porter's interest lies in demonstrating that the reader becomes the narrator, no matter how hard she may try (like Quentin) to remain a detached observer. My focus lies in illustrating *why* the reader cannot remain detached. I will show that this "undetachment" derives from the process the reader undergoes as she attempts to order the narrative. The outcome of this process is an elevated engagement with the novel. This does not occur simply because she writes her own version of the narrative onto the text, but because she discovers herself in the world projected by the text and is therefore part of a mutual narrative process between herself and the "narration."[15] Moreover, and most importantly, I will demonstrate how she came to be there, and how she recognizes her position in the novel.

Porter endorses the reader's "need" to keep up with current events in the fiction and explain those events by her history. However, the reader should not try to empirically *explain* away what seems to be missing from the narrative. Faulkner demands that the reader balance her impetus to sustain a linear narrative in the text through historical clues with a certain degree of ambivalence. As Peter Ohlin notes in "*Through a Glass Darkly*: Figurative Language in Ingmar Bergman's Script," there seems to exist a "thin film or boundary between the world of a certain kind of thoughtless knowing and a world of clarity and understanding" (81). I now extend this concept to include *Absalom, Absalom!* To take an obvious example, the reader who insists on "clarity" in *Absalom* might find herself constantly trying to determine "what actually happened" versus embellishment or "revisionist history" performed by the fictional narrator. A sort of "thoughtless knowing" involves a peculiar sort of reading characterized by an acceptance of *all* events described in the text as real, or, at the very least, *possible*. But then we face the question of what it means to be a critical reader. As critical readers, we expect to analyze a character's

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[15] *See* Chapter 2.

psychology partly by determining which of the events that character narrates are real and which imagined.

We, as intelligent, critical readers, possess a certain detached ability to discern psychological character traits such as dependability, self-awareness (or a lack thereof), and so on, by the way characters tell their stories and the consistency/inconsistency of their remarks. However, I suggest there is a unique novel available to us in *Absalom, Absalom!*, which we will discover if we resist our natural tendency to rely too heavily on natural language provided by characters in the stories they tell. In other words, instead of deconstructing the text to arrive at "logical" explanations for conflicting stories or dialectical oppositions, I suggest that a certain accepted ambivalence informs meaning. This ambivalence allows opposing stories to remain suspended in a world of accumulated dialectical oppositions. And the oppositions represent something new and real, inasmuch as the novel itself is real.

The question of what is "real" versus what is "not real" in the fictional space can be less contentious when viewing a film than when reading a novel because of the way we tend to process what we *see*. Faulkner was obviously aware of the effect film could have on the viewer and used filmic techniques to foster reader engagement. Faulkner's affiliation with the cinema through playwriting and screenwriting has been widely discussed among his critics and biographers. Despite Faulkner's rather haphazard approach to screenwriting for Hollywood, his employers (such as Samuel Marx and Howard Hawks) received solid, timely work from the writer. And though his sometimes weathered appearance and stretches of time "incommunicado" betrayed his love of the drink, Faulkner seemed to take his screenwriting work seriously (Phillips 9-10). Given the often cinematic characteristics of his stories and novels, this comes as no surprise.

Essays by Ilse Dusoir Lind and Bruce Kawin demonstrate how Faulkner's ability to think cinematically informs characteristics in his fiction. Faulkner was drawn to playwriting and screenwriting from the beginning of his writing career. In fact, he was one of the founding members of the University of Mississippi drama (Lind 68). He wrote two plays, only one of which survived in good enough form to print (Lind 69). In this play, entitled "Marionettes," Lind claims that partly through his dramatic influence, Faulkner "projects a world" (Lind 70). This foreshadows what Brian McHale will later define as the ontological characteristics of Faulkner's work.[16] In fact, McHale actually quotes Oedipa Mass's line "Shall I project a world?" from *The Crying of Lot 49* to illustrate what Quentin and Shreve will do in the latter part of *Absalom*. Lind's commentary leads us into the comparisons between Bergman's and Faulkner's engagement strategies, but even more consequential to the pairing is an essay entitled "The Montage Element in Faulkner's Fiction," by Bruce Kawin. Though Kawin asserts from the outset that "the relations between literature and film are notoriously difficult to sort out," this is precisely what I intend to do (Kawin 103).

Noted above, thinking outside of textual language is essential to apprehending Faulkner's work with the highest degree of empathy. So it is that a more or less imagistic reading is a crucial step toward a heightened engagement with *Absalom*. Therefore, it would be nearly impossible to ignore Faulkner's cinematic strategies his earlier critics have examined. Bruce Kawin's position is that Faulkner did not get his ideas from film but rather that Faulkner was doing something films also did: montage. The elements of montage Kawin applies to Faulkner's work are: "oxymoron, dynamic unresolution, parallel plotting[17], rapid shifts in time and space, and multiple narration" (Kawin 109). As Kawin notes, these strategic characteristics lead to a

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[16] In *Postmodernist Fiction*, McHale addresses the "world projected" by Quentin and Shreve in *Absalom, Absalom!*

certain "dialectical montage" (112). According to Kawin, this dialectic "creates a conceptual space in which an event or pose can best be described in terms of the poles it transcends and conjoins" (113-14). Again, what I am interested in is precisely *what there is* at this point – "an instant between dark and dark," as Faulkner refers to it (110). Do these points help establish the boundaries of a new world out of which new ideologies erupt?

According to Kawin, "Faulkner at his best was thinking not in terms of movies but in tropes that are most convincingly explicated in cinematic terms" (105). I argue that we should approach *Absalom* from this posture. In fact, several correlations have already been made between *Absalom* and film. Among them is Kawin's assertion that Faulkner's script for *Sutter's Gold* (though it was rejected) has "a number of connections with *Absalom, Absalom!*" (Kawin 116). Perhaps this is precisely because of the cinematic characteristics of *Absalom*. Images in film are singular – the representations are clear and less susceptible to equivocal interpretation than images projected in a novel. Bergman's images can often become ambiguous, but even their ambiguity is difficult to reject. We see what we see, and we adapt our interpretations to incorporate rational ambiguity if the film projects conflicting images. If we compare conflicting narratives in *Absalom* to conflicting images in *Persona*, it helps us understand the manner in which we process them. By using film as our guide, we can more clearly define the points of collision between the narratives in *Absalom* and *The Sound and the Fury*. In *Persona*, the viewer is privileged to the scenes, images, and events that erupt out of these collisions. Therefore, as critical readers and viewers, we are literally allowed to see the images that constitute new world(s). Once we have achieved a lucid understanding of these points of collision in *Persona*, we are better equipped to recognize them in *Absalom*. The most important parallels between

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[17] These latter two recalling criticism by Slatoff and Porter.

Faulkner and Bergman are the similar reader-engagement strategies they use to foster this

recognition.

Position 1: Identification

Position 2: Alignment

Position 3: Sympathy

Position 4: Empathy

Position 5: New Code Acceptance

Position 6: Ontological Participation

Position 7: Narration
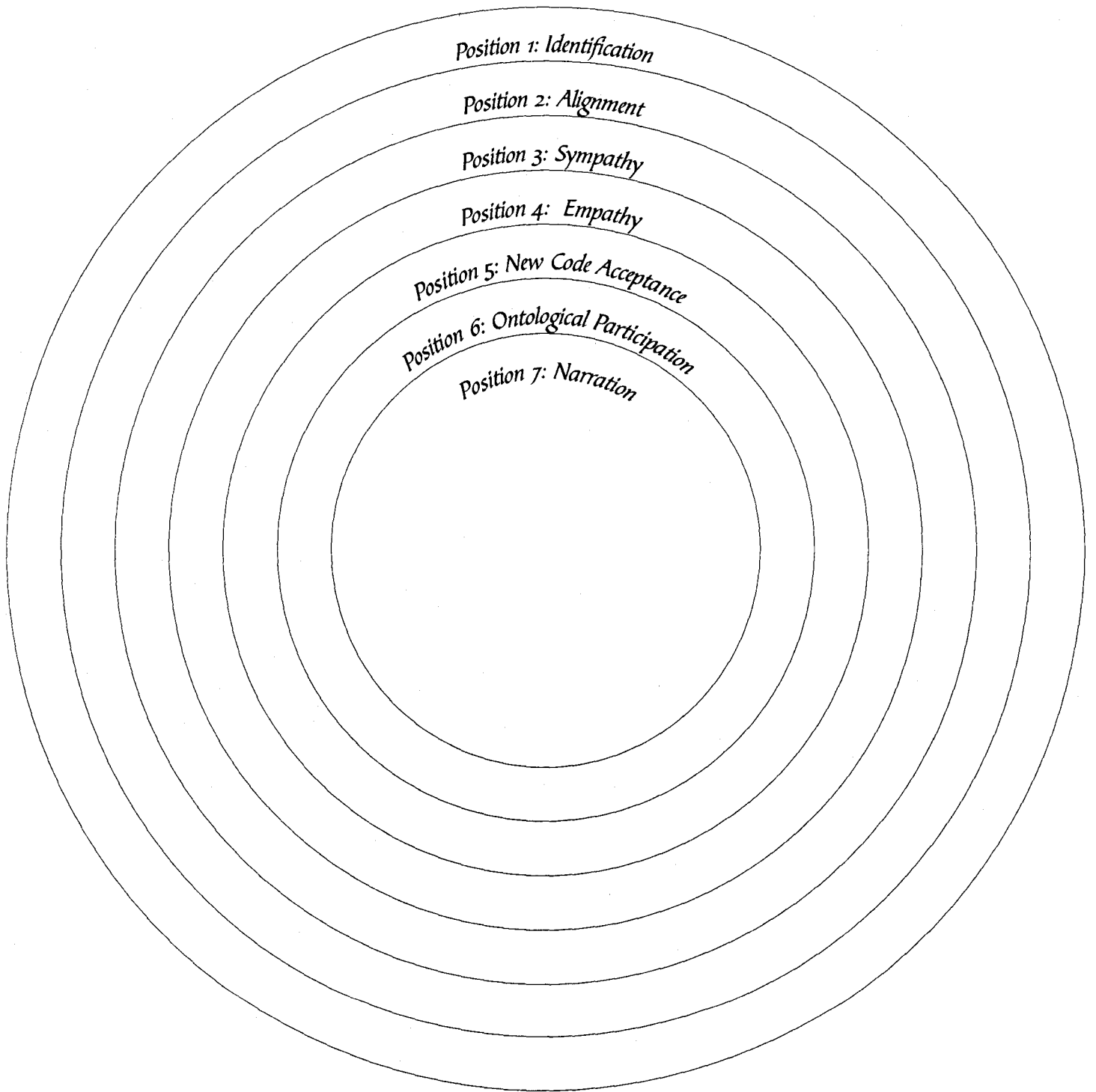
Diagram A

CHAPTER TWO

Conditioning the Receiver: From *Identification* to *Empathy*

As we saw in Chapter One, Faulkner critics have gradually opened their analyses up to a focusing of the self-referential qualities of the southerner's oeuvre. These qualities, combined with the concepts of "reseeing," "dialectical montage," "pre-existing patterns of feeling," and "transport to another world," to name a few, permit an ontological (rather than an epistemological) analysis of his work. Recognizing the ontological parallels between Bergman's *Persona* and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* helps illuminate the way Faulkner conditions his readers to engage ontologically with his work. These ontological parallels become evident only after we recognize some of the primary strategies Bergman and Faulkner employ to engage the audience. Though the paths toward audience participation are similar in *Absalom* and *Persona*, Faulkner's medium demands that he go about the process more slowly, largely because he must use natural language to guide his audience to a place outside of it. First, he engages his readers by presenting them with varying narrative voices and perspectives while he fosters a sense of empathy for corresponding characters and events. Faulkner's strategies for eliciting reader empathy are so subtle that we often tend to overlook them. However, the same (or similar) strategies applied to film are clearer, more obvious. Therefore, Faulkner's strategies for eliciting empathy are among those "best explicated cinematically," and Murray Smith's theoretical analysis of our engagement with film applies well to an investigation of how we engage with Faulkner's fiction. In *Engaging Characters*, Smith reveals that while literary reader-response criticism helps explain some of the motivations and processes that draw us into Faulkner's work, a cinematic approach to empathy helps explain in more finite and specific terms the different *kinds* of responses we have. Smith's book assists in defining the type of empathy the audience

experiences, including the degree to which the work of art engages what he terms the "central imagination" (Smith 76). Umberto Eco's reader-response analysis in *The Role of the Reader* illustrates not only how we achieve central imagining in literary texts, but also how we use this imagination to help produce, or "actualize," a text (Eco 4). Taken together, the ideas espoused by Smith and Eco help illuminate the way we engage with *Absalom* and *Persona*.

Absalom fosters empathy not only with individual characters or events but also with the work of art as a whole; that is, the novel engenders a response to the very thing – cover, pages, letters – we hold in our hands. The novel encourages this empathy through a series of repeated, quasi-cyclical responses to the text. They proceed as follows: *identification, alignment, sympathy, empathy, new code acceptance, ontological participation,* and finally, *narration* (by the audience). If we imagine these stages of textual engagement as a series of concentric circles in the shape of a dart board, *identification* would be located in the outer circle and *narration* in the bull's eye (See Diagram A). The process is not entirely linear, not a direct journey toward the center. For example, the viewer/reader (henceforth referred to as "receiver") could move from *identification* (position one) through *alignment* (position two) to *sympathy* (position three) only to be projected back to *identification* (position one) while simultaneously maintaining *sympathy* (position three) with no *alignment* (position two). Moreover, as she passes from one position to the next, her alignment, identification, or sympathy could occur through a new and different character from the one through whom she initially established it, or with two or more characters simultaneously. Nevertheless, the dart board helps us perceive the process as a gradual progression toward a theoretical center. It also helps us recognize that several components or characters in the text can occupy the space inside one of the circles at the same time. Finally, it enforces the fact that a component or character in the inner circles or bull's eye can implicitly

occupy *all* of the circles outside of it. In other words, if the receiver engages with a character in position six, she can also relate to that character in positions five, four, three, two, or one. In order to achieve heightened engagement with *Absalom*, the she goes through these various stages. A receiver capable of achieving the two innermost stages of engagement with the text, *ontological participation* and *narration*, experiences the work of art to the fullest and most enriching degree, the way I believe Faulkner intended it to be experienced. A phenomenological investigation, including both empirical and speculative evidence, takes us through each of these steps.[18]

Nearly every Faulknerian text demands our immediate engagement. From *Go Down Moses* to *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner typically presents his readers with often cryptic, almost always multi-voiced narratives that rarely follow a chronological order. Noted by critics such as Bruce Kawin and Gene Phillips, this strategy is very much like "cutting" in film from one scene or perspective to another. The "cuts" in Faulkner's work are sometimes difficult to detect at first because there is generally no specific language, no actual words in the narration, indicating that a cut has taken place.[19] These characteristics quickly establish the type of reader demanded by a Faulknerian novel or story. Umberto Eco would refer to this type of reader as a "Model Reader." In *The Role of the Reader*, Eco closely examines, through primarily semiotic means, how the reader is implied in the process of narrating the text. Eco asserts the "'addressee['s]' constitutive element in the process of actualization of a text" (4). As Eco notes, theorists often think of interpretation in terms of "levels," evidence of which we will see in Murray Smith's "structure of sympathy." Giving credence to this posture, I suggest that when the

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[18] In this case, my exploration of empathy with the work of art is a variation of Levi-Straus's definition of social anthropology, which states that it "is devoted especially to the study of institutions considered as systems of representations" (3).

reader engages with the novel on even the most superficial "level" in order to comprehend the plot, she employs sharp, inductive and critical strategies in an attempt to order the events that ostensibly take place in the fictional space of the novel. Though we find ourselves moving back and forth through time and from one narrative perspective to another, we must actively use our experience of the world outside of the text (the world in which we live) to discover the order in which events occur.[20] As Eco notes, "That is why in reading literary texts one is obliged to look backward many times, and, in general, the more complex the text, the more it has to be read twice, and the second time from the end" (*The Role of the Reader* 26).[21]

Bergman draws this type of audience member into *Persona* by presenting her with many successive cuts early in the film. Like Faulknerian narratives such as Benjy's in *The Sound and the Fury*, Bergman's shots initially subject his audience to unfamiliar territory, which she is forced to decipher and define. Beginning with our position in the theatre, viewing *Persona*, we quickly find ourselves inside the camera watching the film alight and then viewing close-ups of different parts of the camera. Soon after, we are situated in the very place (the camera) we have just viewed, seeing the film cartoon itself from the negative perspective. Suddenly, Bergman cuts to hands in motion, and we engage wholly in the film as we attempt to discover the relationship between the cartoon we have just viewed and the hands we view now. A series of unrelated images, including what seem to be images from a morgue, continues to foster this engagement. Then we see the most extended shot up to this point in the film: through the camera, we view a boy who proceeds to look at us. Once aware of ourselves, we quickly discover we are not, in fact, who we thought we were. As the boy reaches out to touch the screen behind which

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[19] As critics such as Cowley, Kenner, and Brooks have noted, there is rather a change in tone, diction, or syntax functioning as clues that a new voice has taken over the narration.

[20] According to Wolfgang Iser, "The world presented [often] seems to have no bearing on what the reader is familiar with"

we are currently situated, a sudden cut privileges us with the position of viewing ourselves from behind the boy, and we discover that we were (are?) alternating images of two women.

Ranging from change in perspective to montage, Bergman's cinematographic techniques force his audience to assume varying perspectives through the camera lens. Like the response Faulkner engenders to the novel as a whole, the response Bergman engenders is to the film as a whole. We are quickly reminded that this is film, and this particular film is a whole, autonomous entity that should not be analyzed by its individual parts. The effect of this is to foster what Martin Heidegger might refer to as an "authentic" acknowledgment of (1) what a film is and (2) the fact that we are watching it and are subject to its equivocation. That is, the film does not provide us with enough of a linear "story" to connect all of the images. If we consider linear, rationally related events in the narrative to be the "equipment" we use to discover meaning (*Being and Time* 102-3), we realize here that the film does not provide us, in this case, with the "equipment" we need to connect these images. In other words, the tools we need to discover how the images relate to one another is not, in Heideggerian terms, "ready-to-hand" (*Being and Time* 98-103). Heidegger also suggests that when the equipment we need to fulfill a task at hand is unavailable to us, we become more authentically aware of the equipment itself.[22] In this case, our task is to find meaning by relating a series of images to one another. So, in light of *Persona*, we can infer that we become aware of a series of *images* as parts of the entity, or film, toward which we comport ourselves. We are aware that the equipment (images) provided is insufficient to complete the task we normally associate with engaging in film. Taken separately, they have no meaning: taken as parts of a totality, however, they have the potential to foster what

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(Iser 17).

[21] As we progress, however, I will show that the receiver must resist her compulsion to attempt to order the events too rigorously.

Heidegger would call authentic (not passive or "practical") awareness of the entire film as an entity to which we must comport ourselves in a certain way.[23] We are engaged in this manner more rapidly in Bergman's film than we are in Faulkner's text because the relationship between "cuts" exists outside of natural language. Our rational propensity when *reading* is to seek out clues *in language*, telling us where cuts occur and why. A "cut," however, is precisely the absence of natural language; therefore, the reader requires a longer, subtler conditioning process to the same end than does the viewer. So the creation of the "Model Reader" (or viewer) is the same, but the process for the work of prose is longer and more challenging to the author.

Faulkner employs prominent, recurring strategies to elicit a sense of *identification*, the first stage (outermost circle) in the system of engagement represented in Diagram A, with characters in the novel. At the first and most basic level, the receiver identifies with a character in *Absalom, Absalom!* through that character's expressed response to his or her experiences and to the experiences of other characters. We also identify with characters as a result of sharing experiences with them and through them. We, the receivers, first identify with Quentin Compson largely because, like Quentin, we are auditors. As we continue, however, we actually receive the story *through* him. At the beginning of the novel, Quentin's listening experience is presented to us through the narrative voice. This mediation keeps us at an initial distance from Quentin because we are able to recognize him as a character in a novel whose experience is described by an authorial voice existing somewhere between ourselves and the "story." A similar identification process occurs in *Persona,* though it is more easily recognizable in the film. We see a boy from the perspective of the camera, and we identify first with the camera as viewer.

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[22] As Sitney notes, Bergman purposefully calls attention to the "equipment" he uses to produce the film: "What Bergman gives us . . . calls to mind the filmmaker's working materials" (Sitney 127).
[23] Though this may only occur as a brief flash of awareness ("Augenblik").

We are able to stand outside of the film through this mediator. But as the boy reaches out and touches us, the screen, the narrative draws us into it through the boy's mind and optical brain receptors. Similarly, when Quentin's thoughts are written in italics, the mediation between us and the novel is suddenly minimized. The narrator does not introduce us to Quentin's mind with words or quotation marks: we are just there, suddenly in his mind and therefore *aligned* with him. Though the relationship between us and the artifice is slightly different in the film than it is in the novel, a similar process is taking place. Both film and novel diminish the narrator as we typically conceive of it, but in both, we only occupy this position of alignment (minimized distance) for an instant.

Persona and *Absalom* "violently" pluck us from our momentary alignment.[24] In the film, we are projected back out of the boy's perception into identification with a new and different camera as we see ourselves from behind the boy and realize that we have been alternating images of two women. Identifying with a new, more omniscient camera that can see both the boy and the women we were, we view the screen of alternating female images. At this point, we wholly occupy position one on the dartboard (identification) as we simultaneously begin entering position two (alignment). Although we still identify with the camera, we are aligned with the boy as we see what he sees. Further, the narrator/camera becomes less central to our identification because its role as narrator has been deprecated by its vulnerability to *being seen* (by us or the boy). We subconsciously choose, on some level, to *align* ourselves with the boy who could see us, at one and the same time as we *identify* with the new camera that can see us

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[24] The concept of "doing violence" to something as a means by which to "lay bare" phenomena in their primordiality is frequently stressed by Heidegger. For example, "Existential analysis," he claims, "constantly has the character of *doing violence*, whether to the claims of the everyday interpretation, or to its complacency and its tranquillized obviousness" (*Being and Time* 359). In this case, ours is a complacency that might lead to everyday interpretation. By "violently" calling attention to our position in the film/novel, Bergman and Faulkner draw us out of this complacency into an alert awareness of the work and its structure.

and the boy. Our identification with camera/narrator still allows us to literally stand outside of the story, behind the boy, watching him as he touches the screen.

Though the process is less conspicuous in the novel, it is much the same. Following our brief alignment with Quentin, we are immediately projected back out of his mind as the narrator describes his thoughts from a mediated distance indicated through normal font. Pulling and pushing us in and out of familiar modes of identification, Faulkner and Bergman begin to destabilize our ideological notions of where we stand opposite (behind? underneath? within? beside?) the fiction. Destabilization is an unremitting strategy in the conditioning process required to draw us into total engagement with the fiction. Moreover, as we progress, we will find that pulling us into one circle on the dartboard and subsequently pushing us back out is a constantly repeated strategy for engaging and disengaging the critical mind. We are very engaged as we move inward on the dartboard, but we are somewhat disengaged each time we are pushed back outward: a sort of disengaged ambivalence frequently subsumes our critical focus.

At the very least, however, we sustain our identification with Quentin as auditors, and Quentin's role reflects our own. Just as Quentin attempts to reconcile his world of experience with the world of the 19th century Yoknapatawpha County, we attempt to reconcile our world of experience with the world of the fiction. To achieve this, Quentin essentially creates two selves:

> Then hearing would reconcile and he would seem to listen to two
>
> separate Quentins now—the Quentin Compson preparing for
>
> Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled
>
> with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening . . . to one of the
>
> ghosts which had refused to lie still . . . telling him about old ghost-
>
> times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to

deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all

that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she

was—the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the

long silence of notpeople in notlanguage . . .   (*AA* 4-5)

Similarly, we will "have to be one" of these 19th century Southerners in order to receive the codes

and ideologies set forth by members of that community.[25]   Though most literary texts seem to

require assuming a sort of persona (through suspension of disbelief) during the reading process, a

Faulknerian novel such as *Absalom* is more demanding of the reader in this respect due to its

excessive indeterminacy.

As the novel progresses, our identification with Quentin will contribute to our

engagement with the text in the innermost circle on our dart board,[26] but the conditioning process

is slow and subtle. First, our identification with Quentin is partially subsumed by Mr.

Compson's narrative in much the same way as our identification with the boy at the beginning of

Persona is subsumed by the narrative of the two women whom he has viewed on the screen (and

presumably continues to view). Moreover, the gradual abatement of the narrative voice (with

infrequently placed quotation marks reminding us that Quentin hears the story from his father)

minimizes the distance between us and Mr. Compson's story so that we not only identify with

Quentin, we begin to realign ourselves with Quentin. Both Quentin and the boy in *Persona* seem

to stand outside of the narratives they hear and view, respectively. Still, our identification with

each of them is subsumed by the narratives they receive because we are now *aligned* with them.

At this point in the system (Diagram A), we still identify (position one) with the narrators, having

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[25] As Wolfgang Iser posits, the literary text is "peculiar" in its "halfway position between the external world of objects and the reader's own world of experience. The act of reading is therefore a process of seeking to pin down the oscillating structure of the text to some specific meaning" (Iser 8).

passed through identification to alignment (position two) with the boys. Because of this alignment, we are less conscious of our underlying identification with the now minimized narrative voices (narrator and camera). We know the narrators are still present, but they do not draw direct attention to themselves, and their diminution draws us further into alignment with the characters in the fictional space. Murray Smith suggests that, in Martin Esslin's words, "Identification allows for . . . the drawing of 'each individual member of the audience into the action by causing him to identify himself with the hero to the point of complete self-oblivion'" (Smith 6). This "self oblivion" is manifest as alignment with the characters. We are not conscious of this transition from identification to alignment during the initial reading/viewing: it is a subtle element of the conditioning process.[27] We accept the transition as somehow natural because we share an intuitive, if not cognizant, understanding of why the narrator has disappeared. Suddenly, we find ourselves identifying with Mr. Compson (via our alignment with Quentin) as he attempts to order and understand the events that took place in the Sutpen and Coldfield families. We are now entirely aligned with Quentin and edging on a derivative empathy. We do not simply imagine *that* we hear Mr. Compson's story. Rather, we feel as though we *are hearing* his story *as* Quentin.

Mr. Compson's sympathetic and empathic responses to what his father has told him drive his assumptions and projections pertaining to these events. For example, as he tells the story of Rosa Coldfield's Aunt, who lived with the family for some time before escaping in the middle of the night, Mr. Compson explains her actions and projects reasons for them:

> She probably looked upon [the marriage between Ellen and
>
> Sutpen] as the one chance to thrust him back into the gullet of

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[26] I will discuss this in detail in Chapter Four.

public opinion . . . , not only to secure her niece's future as his wife

but to justify the action of her brother in getting him out of jail and

her own position as having apparently sanctioned and permitted the

wedding which in reality she could not have prevented . . . for the

sake of that big house and the position and state which the women

realised long before the men did that he not only aimed at but was

going to attain. Or maybe women are even less complex than that

and to them any wedding is better than no wedding and a big

wedding with a villain preferable to a small one with a saint.

(*AA* 40)

Mr. Compson's style of narration is one of reportage-response-projection, reportage-response-

projection, and his insights are often plausible and valid. By and large, we relate to Mr.

Compson in the form of acceptance and rejection of his assumptions. Whether or not we agree

with his assumptions, we identify him as a person to whom we can relate on some level. As he

becomes more enraptured by his own narrative, Mr. Compson occasionally expresses his

assumptions in phrases such as:

I *can imagine* them as they rode, Henry still in the fierce

repercussive flush of vindicated loyalty, and Bon, the wiser, the

shrewder even if only from wider experiences and a few more

years of age, learning from Henry . . . what Sutpen had told him.

Because Henry would have to know now. (my emphasis *AA* 85)

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[27] And its subtlety is reinforced by the fact that we are able to maintain identification with the narrator/camera.

In this passage, we identify with Mr. Compson who "can imagine" the scene. Mr. Compson identifies with Henry when he claims that Henry "would have to know now," and based on what we have learned of Henry, we probably agree. Therefore, we identify with Henry via our ephemeral alignment with Mr. Compson. In other words, Mr. Compson's identification with Henry is *our* identification with Henry and our access to Henry's story. Mr. Compson does not achieve alignment with Henry, however, because his projections about Henry arise out of what Murray Smith would refer to as his "acentral imagination" (Smith 76).

Murray Smith describes his "structure of sympathy" in terms of "levels of engagement" (5). According to Smith, acentral imagination involves a lesser degree of sympathy than central imagination. Smith illustrates acentral imagination as follows: "I imagine *that* I jump off a bridge" – I do not feel it, I merely entertain the idea. By contrast, he represents central imagination with a phrase such as: "I imagine jumping off a bridge" (76). Applying Smith's concept, we observe that Mr. Compson does not imagine himself personally experiencing Henry's situation and knowledge, but rather imagines that Henry must have felt and experienced these things. At this point in the story, we undergo an imaginative process regarding Henry that is similar to Mr. Compson's. Through Mr. Compson (via Quentin via the narrator) we begin to feel *sympathy* (position three) for Henry, as well. Sympathy is a conscious experience and therefore implies a greater distance between ourselves and a character than alignment. Nevertheless, it falls in position three because we have achieved it through subconscious or what Heidegger might call "inauthentic" alignment and identification with other characters.

While we may "acentrally" and consciously feel *sympathy* for Henry at this point in the novel, we have not yet developed such great *empathy* for him that we feel ourselves physically experiencing the same things as Henry. Moreover, while we may identify with Mr. Compson, we

do not imagine ourselves in his position. This is true for two reasons: one, we find ourselves analyzing, contradicting, or agreeing with Mr. Compson's thoughts (in other words, we are able to stand outside of his narration – and therefore the text – and make our own decisions about whether or not we agree); and two, we are still aligned with Quentin as auditor. Quentin's position within the novel still parallels our own. Taken together, the experience of listening (Quentin to his father) and the experiencing of making assumptions based on a story heard (what Mr. Compson does based on his own father's, "grandfather's," story) reflect the experience of the reader. So, our deeper engagement with the text results from the fact that we sympathize with Henry (position three) through Mr. Compson *at one and the same time* as we identify with Mr. Compson (position one) through our alignment (position two) with Quentin. The text rarely acknowledges (through language or punctuation) our identification with the narrator though we do sustain it. Also, we are engaged on so many levels with the novel that we rarely think consciously about the presence of a narrator. The novel's focus at this point is on Henry's story, so we are more consciously engaged with this "story" than with the novel as a whole entity.

As Mr. Compson projects further, he begins to express his assumptions about Henry's thoughts and feelings as fact. As he does so, as he starts forcing these projections into a sort of authenticity, and his insights become more universal; therefore, they become insights with which the receiver is more likely to agree (or, at the very least, less likely to refute). For example, Mr. Compson says,

> Without his knowing what he was it was as though to Henry the
>
> blank and scaling barrier in dissolving produced and revealed not
>
> comprehension to the mind, the intellect which weighs and
>
> discards, but striking instead straight and true to some primary

blind and mindless foundation of all young male living dream and

hope—a row of faces like a bazaar of flowers, the supreme

apotheosis of chattelry, of human flesh bred of the two races for

that sale . . . (*AA* 89)

For a moment here, a *certain receiver* is not thinking about the fact that this is Mr.

Compson's projection (or perhaps his father's projection passed down to him), but thinking,

"Yes! I, too have had such an experience." Similar moments begin to occur more frequently as

the novel progresses. Coupled with the first person delivery of these insightful passages, their

universality begins to minimize the space between certain readers and the novel.[28] Moreover,

Mr. Compson's insight is more than just a projection of Henry's thoughts: it is our warning.

Though we may not yet be conscious of it (at least during the initial reading), we too are

gradually beginning to experience the novel "not as comprehension to the mind, the intellect

which weighs and discards," but rather as that which "strik[es] instead straight and true to some

primary blind and mindless foundation of all . . . living dream and hope."[29] The "blind and

mindless" quality of our reading experience will become more and more overwhelming as we

progress through the various stages of engagement with the text. Again, the process is slow and

subtle, especially with respect to Mr. Compson's narrative, for insights such as these are often

quickly contrasted by far less insightful sentiments stricken through by Mr. Compson's

characteristic ideologies. It helps here to consider the way Bergman achieves this in the film.

Once the story proper begins in *Persona*, we engage in a new and different way with the

film. Every alignment and identification we have passed through in the film is wholly subsumed

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[28] The reader's use of personal intuition "has often been defined as the immediate presence of the known to the knower, but it is seldom that anyone has reflected on the requirements of the notion of the immediate. Immediacy is the absence of any mediator;

by the story of the two women, Alma and Elisabet, whom we have both been aligned with and viewed on the screen. Demonstrated above, passing through camera lenses is one and the same as passing from position one (identification) to position two (empathy). In the same way as we have become engrossed in Henry's "story," we become engrossed in Alma and Elisabet's story and stop thinking consciously about our degree of alignment with the boy (who also watched and presumably still watches them on screen). Moreover, the narrative "voice," if you will, of the camera has been somewhat subsumed by the story itself, such that we tend to forget entirely that we continue to identify with it. A certain receiver knows subconsciously of her alignment/identification, but she is more concerned with understanding and establishing immediate relationships with the characters now on the screen than with her underlying alignments/identification.

I refer to "certain receivers" by which I mean those readers/viewers whom Eco calls "Model Readers." He argues that a "Model Reader" derives from what he terms an "open text" (*The Role of the Reader* 9). Eco's concept of an "open text" essentially involves an indeterminate text (such as *Absalom*) that:

> *creates* the competence of its Model Reader . . . Thus it seems that
> a well-organized text on the hand presupposes a model of
> competence coming, so to speak, from outside the text but on the
> other hand works to build up, by merely textual means, such a
> competence. (7-8)

---

that is obvious, for otherwise the mediator alone would be known and not what is mediated" (Gresset 172, from *Being and Nothingness*).

[29] Consider again Peter Ohlin's reference to "a certain kind of thoughtless knowing."

Eco's basic notion is that a text which "obsessively aims at arousing a precise response in fact lies open to endless interpretations;" however, a text that seems "open"[30] to a number of interpretations (such as *Finnegans Wake*, *Ulysses*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Absalom, Absalom!*) ultimately becomes more and more "closed," as certain critical readers will likely come to specific, similar conclusions about the narrative.[31] As the receiver progresses through *Absalom*, her conclusions do, indeed, become more focused as they become less subject to rejection. Like Mr. Compson's universal conclusion about Henry's experience, the "Model Reader's" conclusions are neither that which can be rejected or accepted – they simply *are*.

Mr. Compson also makes projections, through the application of his own capacity for sympathy (usually stemming from his acentral imagination), regarding the feelings and experiences of Rosa Coldfield. Mr. Compson addresses the possible reasons for Rosa's move to Sutpen's Hundred immediately following her sister, Ellen's death. Mr. Compson claims that this would be the "natural thing for her or any Southern woman, gentlewoman" to do. He says:

> She would not have needed to be asked; no one would expect her
>
> to wait to be. Because that's what a Southern lady is. Not the fact
>
> that, penniless and with no prospect of ever being otherwise and
>
> knowing that all who know her know this . . . It is as though she
>
> were living on the actual blood itself like a vampire, not with
>
> insatiability . . . but with that serene and idle splendor of flowers
>
> arrogating to herself, because it fills her veins also, nourishment

---

[30] Eco's concept of an open text is similar to Iser's concept of an indeterminate text.

[31] I use the term "certain reader" as a variation of Eco's "Model Reader" because, with respect to the dart board metaphor, his terminology implies that a reader who engages with the novel on only the three outermost circles of the dart board has an inferior

from the old blood that crossed uncharted seas and continents . . .

<div align="right">(AA 68)</div>

His ideas about why a Southern woman would choose (or need) to rely on even a "demon" family member help foster in us (assuming we are the "certain receivers" named above) a sense of sympathy for Rosa. Our comportment toward Rosa is generally one of sympathy rather than empathy for several reasons. The first and most obvious reason is that the narrator has offered us a clear description of Rosa at the beginning of the novel. From that moment forward, we have a distinct image in our minds of the person about whom Mr. Compson speaks, and it is not an image of ourselves. Additionally, the narrator has drawn a clear distinction at the beginning of the novel between Rosa and Quentin, with whom we are aligned. Finally, Mr. Compson's assumptions about Rosa typically stem from his acentral imagination, and we feel sympathy through him.

Mr. Compson's projections about Rosa's motives also serve deeper purpose grounded in the fact that his projections are, for the most part, correct. Rosa Coldfield's narrative provides evidence of his accuracy. Her explanation for deciding to marry Sutpen, though stated differently (with her typically implacable tone of "undefeat") is much the same as Mr. Compson would assume it to be:

> I dont [sic] plead material necessity: the fact that, an orphan a
>
> woman and a pauper, I turned naturally not for protection but for
>
> actual food to my only kin . . . though I defy anyone to blame me,
>
> an orphan of twenty, a young woman without resources, who
>
> should desire not only to justify her situation but to vindicate the

---

reading experience. Rather, I would argue that this latter reader of *Absalom* merely has a *different*, but not inferior, reading

> honor of a family the good name of whose women has never been
>
> impugned, by accepting the honorable proffer of marriage from the
>
> man whose food she was forced to subsist on.   (*AA* 12-13)

The accuracy of Mr. Compson's ideas validates each character's projections and assumptions as

real and important components of the narrative. They demonstrate that everything *in* the novel

must be accepted as real, for each projection is as real as any of the ostensibly "true" recounts of

the Sutpen and Coldfield stories. The author only includes them in the novel as part of the

narration and not merely as representations of a character's thoughts. These projected fictional

realities[32] originate empathy with the entire text, the novel itself. Because filmic images are

undeniably before us on the screen, we are more likely to accept them as representations of real

events occurring in the narrative. As David Boyd notes, "The entire effect of [Persona] has

depended on the ability of film to confer on all events, without indications to the contrary, an

equivalent degree of reality: everything shown on the screen is *there*, present" (Boyd 12).

Contrary to empirically rational thought, we must accept that Faulkner also "confers on all events

. . . an equivalent degree of reality." Mr. Compson's projections about these events gradually

emerge as explanations of why things happened this way, deserving a certain degree of reality.

Mr. Compson's intuition about other characters in the novel may at times seem less

evolved than Quentin's; nonetheless, his ideas provide us with a sense of what life was like in

the South for his father's generation. Part of his knowledge has been passed down from

Quentin's grandfather and other family members in "A few old mouth-to-mouth tales . . . letters

---

experience.

[32] At this point in my analysis, I use the term "real" largely to draw a distinction between that which has occurred in the "story" and that which can be reduced to psychoanalysis. In consideration of both *Persona* and *Absalom*, I agree with Murray Smith who views psychoanalysis as a narrow angle from which to approach narrative analysis. In other words, I approach *Absalom* and *Persona* from and entirely non-psychoanalytic perspective: the distinction between "real" and "psychoanalytical" is the same as the distinction between *Absalom* or *Persona* and another work of art.

without salutation or signature" (80). Out of these "words, . . . symbols, the shapes themselves," Mr. Compson derives insight through which, he says, "we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting" (80). This type of expression is what Heidegger might call a "clue" that sparks preliminary subconscious thought among us. Which "words, symbols, or shapes" in the novel contain the seeds in which "we ourselves lay dormant and waiting?" Though moving forward in time and space through letters and stories, Mr. Compson simultaneously moves inward toward the root of his existence. And at the center of his existence is the artifice itself: the novel (though Mr. Compson will not achieve the insight required to question directly the root of his own existence). At this point in our reading experience, Mr. Compson's journey parallels our own, and we can sympathize with him, almost to the point of empathizing, as we wade through jumbled narratives and ghost-like shapes to try to find clues that will lead us into the novel: the artifice.

Mr. Compson relies heavily on natural language to transmit meaning and lead to understanding. This reliance on natural language impedes Mr. Compson's ability to connect with other characters and with his own being. At times, Mr. Compson's espousals suggest that he can at least imagine communication beyond language:

> [A] dialogue without words, speech, which would fix and then
>
> remove without obliterating one line the picture, . . . the plate
>
> prepared and innocent again: . . . the exposures . . . so brief as to
>
> be cryptic, almost staccato, the plate unaware of what the complete
>
> picture would show, scarce-seen, yet ineradicable.[33]   (*AA* 88)

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[33] This passage reveals the filmic character of the text, as well. We can imagine this as images on the screen with the white screen between each image – the white moment during which our imaginations fill the space like the white space between the words on a page to which Derrida has drawn our attention.

These passages inspire us to begin thinking about communication without language. However, although Mr. Compson's insights are, as he admits, "dim," he persists in his futile efforts to bring them to light through natural language. Intuitively, we have begun to recognize that their vagueness is one of their primary, defining characteristics. So, despite some of Mr. Compson's valuable and penetrating insights, we critical readers will still recognize Mr. Compson's narrative as clearly emanating from one man, and we remain, for the most part, detached from his narrative as auditors. Nevertheless, we *identify* with Mr. Compson as he relates to other characters in the novel (dead or alive), and we *sympathize* (position four) with those characters through him. Therefore, our engagement with Mr. Compson's narrative reinforces our position in the first category of engagement with the text: *identification*. Further, by identifying with Mr. Compson, we *sympathize* through him with other characters in the novel. Therefore, we have passed through to the third level of engagement: *sympathy*. Most importantly, our identification with Mr. Compson emanates from position two, our *alignment* with Quentin, the character with whom we are so closely aligned as to experience identification with Mr. Compson.

Emphasizing the fact that our engagement with the text is with the entire novel itself, however, the voice of the narrator will project us back out of our alignment with Quentin near the end of Mr. Compson's first extended narrative.[34] Moreover, the narrator's words themselves emphasize our engagement with the words, pages, the novel in our hands, as well as the fact that this engagement has led to our alignment with Quentin. As Quentin begins to read a letter (represented in italics) written two generations earlier in Yoknapatawpha County, the narrative voice describes his reading experience:

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[34] As Smith notes, the "narration" is the "ultimate 'organizer' of the text; . . . the force which generate recognition, alignment, and allegiance, the basic components of the structure of sympathy" (75). At this point in the reading experience, we engage with the narra*tion*, not merely the narra*tor*.

> Quentin . . . read the faint spidery script not like something
>
> impressed upon the paper by a once-living hand but like a shadow
>
> cast upon it which had resolved on the paper the instant before he
>
> looked at it and which might fade, vanish, at any instant while he
>
> still did.[35] (*AA* 102)

This moment in the text suddenly propels us back out of our alignment with Quentin. One among several such instances, this is part of the conditioning process we go through in order to pass from one position on our dart board to the next with minimal resistance. It stresses the necessary subtlety of the process, for it allows us to occupy, if only for a moment, our comfortable position in front of the novel and to retain our ideologies about suspension of disbelief.[36] It causes us to forget at one and the same time as we remember that we are being drawn into the text. We encounter our resistance to suspension of disbelief, and:

> Letting something be encountered is primarily *circumspective*; it is
>
> not just sensing something, or staring at it. It implies
>
> circumspective concern, and has the character of becoming
>
> affected in some way . . . But to be affected by the unserviceable,
>
> resistant, or threatening character of that which is ready-to-hand,
>
> becomes ontologically possible only in so far as Being-in as such

---

[35] This is akin to the Foucauldian concept of the "Death of the author." Foucault claims that "[T]he author is not an indefinite source of signification which fills a work; the author does not precede the work; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short , by which one impedes the circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" (Foucault 118-19).

[36] Consider the "paradox of fiction" espoused by Brecht in which he claims that we respond to fiction as if we both know and do not know that we are responding to fiction. At this moment, the text acknowledges that we know we are reading fiction. Also, the "reason-emotion antinomy," involving the idea that reason and emotion are at odds with one another. At this point in the reading experience, the text gives us a chance to remember that the sympathy we feel *through* Quentin is entirely a construct. We have never, in fact, *been* Quentin at all. He is just a character in a novel.

has been determined existentially beforehand in such a manner that

what it encounters within-the-world can *"matter"* to it in this way.

<div align="right">(*Being and Time* 176)</div>

We have received a clue in the novel about the way we are relating to it. As critical readers, we

are within-the-world of the fiction (which includes the critical discourse around it) deeply enough

for the narrator's message to "matter" to us in the way Heidegger articulates. This sort of two-

steps-forward, one-step-back (on our dart board: two-steps-inward, one-step-out) conditioning

process is absolutely essential to achieving what will become an *ontological participation* in the

novel. The process involves shedding the codes and ideologies we have brought to the reading

experience, and we are not likely to surrender them willingly.

Eco discusses this code-shedding process in *The Role of the Reader*. As Eco notes, "An

ideological bias can lead a critical reader to make a text say more than it apparently says, that is,

to find out what in the text is ideologically presupposed, untold" (22). This would seem to

suggest that, with respect to *Absalom*, our preexisting ideologies are partially responsible for

bringing the "dim" parts of the text to light. While this is true concerning assimilation of

passages such as Mr. Compson's "universal" statement about Henry's experience mentioned

above, it is not so of our overall engagement with the text. In fact, in order to engage on a deeper

empathetic level with the text, we must shed those ideologies and adopt some of those set forth

by the novel as a whole. In the first case, the "text asks for ideological cooperation on the part of

the reader" (Eco 22). In the second case, however – the case involving the larger question of our

ability to empathize with the text as a whole – "the text seems to refuse any ideological

commitment, although its ideological message consists in just this refusal" (22). *Absalom*

provides us with clues that its ideological message forbids the sustained employment of the

<div align="right">44</div>

preconceptions and ideologies we have brought to the reading experience. The text's

acknowledgment of our position outside the novel causes us to think about our reading

experience and to maintain a delicate balance between drawing us in and letting us occupy our

world outside the novel. Should the text attempt to draw us in too quickly, we will reject it for

its overt denial of our ability to detect the more carefully concealed strategies in the text. This

rejection can occur because: (1) if the text attempts to draw us in too quickly, we might cling to

the ideology that a construct is incapable of subsuming our agency; or (2) if the intended

"drawing in" occurs too rapidly, our intuitive discomfort with loss of agency could cause us to

reject the novel altogether.[37]

Now that the narrator's interjection has rendered us less resistant to engaging with the

text, the novel takes advantage of our derivative quasi-ambivalence. I noted above that, at the

beginning of the text, the mediation of the narrative voice was minimized by the representation

of Quentin's thoughts through italics. The letter Quentin is reading at the moment of narrative

intervention is written in italics. Perhaps unconsciously, therefore, we now associate the act of

reading words in italics with reading real, tangible words that were written in the real world (our

world outside of the novel) by a human being. The association lies somewhere between the

novel and the world outside the novel and therefore remains subconscious largely because it

relies wholly on acceptance of a code. This code combines two ideologies: (1) our "ideological

overcoding"[38] that a letter we receive in the world in which we live is a real document written by

---

[37] Once again, I stress that the more rapid erosion of our ideologies when viewing *Persona* is possible because we are inherently more likely to accept what we undeniably see on screen.

[38] Eco uses this term to describe what Heidegger would call our "practical" or "everyday" ideologies we bring to our reading of a text.

a real person and not by an "author" such as Faulkner;[39] and (2) a new ideology that a written

letter is *real* in the fictional space because it is italicized. Shortly after we have finished reading

the letter with Quentin, Mr. Compson's narrative ends and we are immediately propelled back

into an *italicized* narrative. Our conditioned response then is to assume that this narrative is *real*.

This becomes the crucial, deciding moment in the system of engagement I propose, for the

italicized narrative in question is that of Rosa Coldfield . . . almost.

Rosa Coldfield's narrative stresses thought outside of natural language, especially written

language, and leads us comfortably into position four (*empathy*) in the system of engagement.

Additionally, the idiocratic conditions of her narrative presentation demand that we achieve *new*

code acceptance (position four) if we are to engage wholly with her story. Rosa's narrative

immediately demands thought beyond natural language, beyond the words in the text, because no

words in the text have led us into her narrative. No words in the text read "Rosa said . . ." We

cannot rely on natural language to place us inside of the narrative.[40] When we first encounter

Rosa's narrative, we have just been conditioned to think of italicized narratives as representations

of "real" words written by a character in the fictional space, especially *when we are aligned with*

a character such as Quentin. Now, we are suddenly expected to receive italicized words as the

representation of Rosa's narrative voice. With the appropriate level of ambivalence (induced by

the text's recent acknowledgement of our critical capacity to recognize a construct), we simply

read on without thinking consciously about the ambiguous signification of italics. But on a pre-

cognitive level (the level, perhaps, of "thoughtless knowing,") we dimly remember that italics

represent Quentin's thoughts, as established in the opening segment of the novel. In fact, I would

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[39] This hearkens the Foucauldian concept of the "author." He suggests: "A private letter may well have a signer—it does not have an author . . ." (Foucault 108-9). But this is a private (fictional) letter by a (real) author. The fictional world and the real

argue that Rosa's narrative *is* Quentin's thoughts. As "Model Readers," we are so completely aligned with Quentin at this point that we are remembering with him what we were told by Rosa Coldfield. Most importantly, we have been conditioned to think of the italicized narrative as REAL. So Quentin's thoughts have become the ostensibly "true" story. Whenever a quotation mark is used in this part of the narrative, it is a single quotation mark, suggesting that the whole narrative was actually told by Rosa and retold by another fictional narrator. But where are the quotation marks around the entire narrative? There are no quotation marks because they are not necessary. It does not matter who told what to whom because it is all "real" in the fictional space: everyone's story is true whether it is remembered, written, or uttered in the fictional space.

Earlier, I noted that the accuracy of Mr. Compson's narrative begins to foster empathy with the entire text. Essentially, this is a quasi-epistemological discovery: we can use rational thought to infer that if his projections are accurate, this could mean that all projections are accurate. By the time we reach Rosa's italicized narrative, the realness of a narrative is less something we induce than something we accept blindly because of the subtle manipulation of how we engage with the novel as a whole, including the tools (such as italics) it utilizes. We accept the realness of her narrative as a part of the novel's ontology, which I will address at length in Chapter Four. At this point, I stress that we *empathize* wholly with Quentin, we are Quentin, remembering the telling of this story as a real event in our lives. And this empathy has required us to adopt a new ideology about what is real in the fictional world. Moreover, the

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world collide. Though the epistolary style is certainly not new (especially when we consider 18th century fiction such as *Pamela* or *Evelina*), the function this collision serves is peculiar.

[40] Eco refers to readers who rely entirely on language, on the "blatant reiteration of key words," as "naïve readers" (Eco 26).

sensation of remembering, rather than hearing for the first time, Rosa's story is yet another part of the process of engagement with the text.

The cyclical presentation of narratives causes us to think that we already know the new incidents presented in the narrative.[41] When we first encountered Rosa's narrative, it was through the mediated narrative voice. It was the true story of which the novel (the "narration") was aware. Now that we empathize with the novel, we feel as though we already know what the novel knows about Rosa when, in fact, we have only just begun to learn, and only in fragments. The result is that fragments begin to seem complete partly because we are subconsciously filling in the gaps. In Eco's view, we begin to "actualize" the story. I was fascinated when I read the following editor's note by Malcolm Cowley:

> Now in his sixties, he tried again to beget a son; but his wife's
>
> younger sister, Miss Rosa Coldfield, was outraged by his proposal
>
> ("Let's try it," he had said, "and if it's a boy we'll get married").
>
> <div align="right">(The Portable Faulkner 12)</div>

What Cowley writes here *is never written in Rosa's narrative.* In fact, it was the implicit insult Sutpen gave to Rosa before he "made her a widow without being a bride." Rosa's narrative indicates only that "he stood with the reins over his arm . . . and spoke the bold outrageous words exactly as if he were consulting with Jones or with some other man about a bitch dog or a cow or mare" (*AA* 136). The only place this insult is written in natural language is in the narrative projected by Quentin and Shreve. But Malcolm Cowley accepts it as fact largely because when Quentin and Shreve utter it, Cowley felt as though he already knew it was so. This is the

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[41] Remember that we have read a very condensed version of Rosa's narrative at the beginning of the novel. When we first read this condensed version, the distance between ourselves and Rosa was at its greatest: the distance was a result of the narrator's description of Rosa, the strong presence of narrative voice, and our identification with Quentin.

astounding nature of Faulkner's strategy for causing us to "actualize" a text: we turn

implications into realities, or actualities. Essentially, the sensation of remembering everything

we read begins here, with Rosa's narrative, largely because we have read her speech at the

beginning of the novel, then we read Mr. Compson's projections about it, and now we live it in

Quentin's mind as our own memory, so that it seems "always already" in the fictional space we

occupy. Rosa's narrative itself reflects this ideology with sentiments such as:

> The Sutpen face not approaching, not swimming up out of the
>
> gloom, but already there, rocklike and firm and antedating time and
>
> house and doom and all, waiting there. (*AA* 109)

This is yet another new ideology we assume despite everything we, as critical readers, know

about the reading experience. Though we know that a fictional event does not exist until it is

presented to us in narrative, we feel it has existed in our minds first. Somehow we feel that we

already know the story we are about to learn, and this can only happen outside of natural

language – outside of the language provided by the text.

Our sensation of already knowing Rosa's story has an enormous, positive impact on our

engagement with the novel as a whole, with the narration's ability to foster empathy with the

letters, words, pages in our hands. Partly due to its structure, the novel causes us to think we

know something we cannot, in fact, know. Conditioned now to this response, we experience

Rosa's narrative accordingly. As a reminder, this stems from *identification*, *alignment*, and

empathy with Quentin, *identification* with his father (through which we felt *sympathy* for Henry),

identification with the narrative voice, and an emerging acceptance of the *new ideologies* within

the novel. Though evolving at different moments in the reading experience, our position within

each of these circles on the dartboard is sustained at one time. Consider, for a moment, the way

we engage with the story of Alma and Elisabet in *Persona*. As we move into the protagonists' "story" proper, we gradually forget consciously, or "authentically," the path we took to get there. In this case, our inauthentic mode of thought stems from the "ready-to-hand" quality of Alma and Elisabet's current situation. Earlier, I suggested that available natural language in a text is the "equipment" we use to organize a text and produce meaning. When this equipment is unavailable, "its unusability thus discovered, [and] equipment becomes conspicuous" (*Being and Time* 102). Alma and Elisabet's story, however, initially follows a rational, linear path the elements of which we can connect to one another with little critical effort. It does not make present to our minds the equipment we use to order the narrative. So, when we begin to feel empathy for Alma, for example, we are not thinking authentically about the many underlying constructs and multiple identifications and alignments we sustain in order to receive her story and feel empathy for her. Similarly, when we progress through Rosa's narrative, we forget (authentically) similar constructs that brought us to into it.

Once entirely engaged with Rosa's story, we begin to discover that she omits details in natural language from her story. This causes us to think outside of natural language *inside* of this story, and this story, like Alma and Elisabet's story, has evolved out of the enormously elaborate structure that has brought us into it in the first place. As we will see, the omission of language in Rosa's narrative (emanating from Quentin) originates *empathy* (position four) for Rosa, but this empathy is a newer and deeper empathy than any we have experienced so far for its requisite, sustained engagement with the novel on all of the other levels represented in Diagram A. As we read Rosa's narrative, we feel empathy for her, not only out of sympathy for the suffering of a character in a novel, but also out of empathy for the novel itself and our experience of reading it. Rosa speaks of her childhood: "My childhood . . . had taught me (and little else) to listen before

I could comprehend and to understand before I even heard" (*AA* 112). We empathize with her

not only because the feeling is familiar to us, but also because it sparks an immediate memory-

recognition of our current reading experience. We listen to her "before we understand," but we

also "understand before we even hear."

Progressing through Rosa's story, we encounter many instances in which ideas and events

are incompletely narrated. We also encounter "points of entry" into the story that enable us to

complete those ideas and events. For example, as Rosa describes the moment when she arrived

at the house after Henry shot Bon, she claims that she had come "not too late as [she] had

thought, but come too soon. Because it was not Henry's face. It was Sutpen face enough, but not

his . . ." Despite the consequential role Clytie will play in Rosa's story, much of Rosa's narrative

passes before she will indicate who, in fact, possesses this "sphinx face . . . look[ing] down from

the loft beside Judith's" (*AA* 109). The "coffee colored" face is no more than a dark image in

motion causing us to think less about *who* the image is than about *what* the image is. We are

inspired to complete the story behind the image rather than have the image's story completed

with a name. Musing on the image, incomplete and yet central, we feel propelled, like Rosa into:

> *that dream-state in which you run without moving from a terror in*
>
> *which you can not* [sic] *believe, toward a safety in which you have*
>
> *no faith, held so not by the shifting and foundationless quicksand*
>
> *of nightmare but by a face which was its soul's own inquisitor.*
>
> (*AA* 113-14)

Her narrative freezes us in a state of foreboding but of what we do not know, so we begin

to create our own shapeless image of foreboding. Indeed, the images *Absalom* compels us to

create are surprisingly shapeless and the narration encourages us to let them remain this way. We

are motivated to think about characters and events in terms of "incomprehensible shadows" (*AA* 131), but unlike "indeterminate" texts such as *Ulysses* or *Vanity Fair*, *Absalom* does not encourage us to provide earthly, material shapes between light and shadow. The shadow begins to form between the novel and ourselves as though to draw both entities into itself. Having been conditioned so carefully to this response, however, we become comfortable in the shadow and allow it to embrace us in its cold grasp. When we finally read the name "Clytie," she exists in a form projected neither by the novel nor by our "actualization," but rather by an ambiguity that lies somewhere in between. Our empathy for Rosa gradually becomes all-encompassing not because we imagine ourselves to be her, but rather because we experience her experiences and feel her sensations first-hand as they emanate from Quentin. And lest our ambivalent subconscious forget they emanate from Quentin, the narration provides us with a subtle reminder through its cyclical repetition of sensations, as well as a warning. "This is the substance of remembering—" Rosa's narrative reads,

> *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 a dream.* (*AA* 115)

We empathetically experience this automaton-like state of notmemory, of muscles groping, at one and the same time as we recognize its self-referentiality. A certain reader "who 'cannot hear' and 'must feel' may perhaps be one who is able to hearken very well, and precisely because of this" (*Being and Time* 207). Precisely because this reader resists the temptation to interpret and instead allows the text to descend upon her as she feels her way through the pages.

And at just this moment, Rosa says that it was a "summer of wistaria. It was a pervading everywhere of wistaria" (*AA* 115). Assuming we are the "model readers" to whom Eco refers, this passage will immediately project our "muscles" into the beginning of the novel where we could access Quentin's thoughts through italics and via a present narrative voice. Though we are unaware during the first reading of the novel, we accept the ambivalent signification of italics. Moreover, the passage leading into the wistaria has conditioned us not to seek out a "resultant sum" of each possible meaning, for that "sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of a dream" (*AA* 115). But some muscle somewhere knows this is Quentin's mind and a letter and Rosa and narrator and real (not merely psychological).

Rosa's narrative also inspires thought beyond natural language for it describes not what *is* but rather what *is not*. For example, she offers us little material information about Sutpen. Instead, her narrative stresses his rationally impossible not-thereness during the time when he was, in fact, there at Sutpen's Hundred. "The shell of him was there," we read, "using the room which we had kept for him and eating the food which we produced and prepared . . . Yes. He wasn't there." And as we progress through her story, we encounter other cases in which what is not *is*. Rosa's ghost-like narrative voice even goes so far as to describe herself in terms of what is not, at least from the perspective of Thomas Sutpen. Her voice says,

> *My presence to him [was] only the absence of black morass and*
>
> *snarled vine and creeper to that man who had struggled through a*
>
> *swamp with nothing to guide or drive him—only some*
>
> *incorrigibility of undefeat.   (AA 134)*

Because the narrative has recently dissuaded us from thinking of the notperson in terms of wholeness or completion, we, as "model readers" will resist the temptation. Lest we forget, she

reminds us (Quentin reminds us) that "there are some things for which three words are too many, and three thousand words that many words too less"[42] (*AA* 134).

Rosa's narrative does not encourage us to determine its indeterminacy in words; however, it does encourage us to enter into its incompleteness. Written as though it is drawing us into a sort of vacuum, her narrative subtly stresses the vacuum in which we already exist: Quentin's mind. It also reminds us of the barrier between ourselves and the fiction, and we wish to break it. We feel as though, with Rosa, we "suffer from but the tedious repercussive anti-climax of . . . see[ing] a closed door but . . . not enter[ing] it" (*AA* 121). So we try to push "through a glass darkly" like Karen in Bergman's film by that name: "I just pressed myself against the wall, and opened it just like a wall of leaves *and then I was inside*." In pressing, however, we find ourselves inside no particular place but rather in a vacuum of:

> occurrences which stop us dead as though by some impalpable
>
> intervention, like a sheet of glass through which we watch all
>
> subsequent events transpire as though in a soundless vacuum, and
>
> fade, vanish; are gone, leaving us immobile, impotent, helpless;
>
> fixed, until we can die.   (*AA* 122)

She reminds us of the barrier through which we experience the fiction, like the camera lens through which we watch *Persona*. But she brings us into such close proximity with it that we find ourselves whirling around in a vacuum in which the glass whirls around with us. Somehow, when we try to stop and fix our gaze, the beveled glass stops in our line of vision, blurring the image. What is most important, though, is that we are inside of the vacuum, inside of the narrative, inside of Quentin's mind.

---

[42] Heidegger argues that the most authentic form of language is silence (Heidegger 208-9).

Inside of the vacuum, we begin to recognize his mind's voice, a voice that is a slave to the narration, to the novel itself. A voice of a character looking through the glass toward the only entity capable of completing him: the reader, us. The voice entreaties us with a wordless message hoping we will meet it somewhere in this vacuum of soundlessness. Hoping we will recognize the question it asks, "What am I?" and knowing that the answer has no words. The voice knows we cannot give it form through words. But words are all it has – words on a page, pages in a novel. It is no mistake that the novel has not given us a description of Quentin so far, and rendering him nothing but the artifice itself. He is a vacuum into which we and the novel plunge without contact. So this leaves Quentin "immobile, impotent, helpless; fixed, until [he] can die" and that part of ourselves which gave him life to die with him.

At the very moment when we are Quentin and we sense our shared existence, the narrative voice plucks us from the vacuum, suddenly and without warning. Moreover, it reminds us that we were Quentin, for what stops us is that door:

> Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which
>
> he too could not pass—that door, the running feet on the stairs
>
> beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot, the two women.

> (*AA* 139)

At our most engaged moment in the reading, we are stopped short, the vacuum frozen, the elaborate structure of engagement which has brought us there broken down as we are violently pushed back to the outer circle on the dartboard: the narration makes a statement. In *Persona*, this event is far less subtle and is, in fact, ushered in with violence. This moment in both the film and the novel will ultimately lead us into *ontological participation* in the work of art.

CHAPTER THREE

Encoding: The Pivotal Transition

If an intelligence at a given time had known the position of all
particles of matter, nothing would be unknown and the past as well
as the future would lie open before [its] eyes.

Pierre Laplace

Chapter Two addressed some of the emerging "new codes" we begin to adopt as receivers

of the fiction. It is absolutely essential that we accept these new codes while we simultaneously

retain and employ *only* our preexisting ideologies appropriate to the fiction. After we complete

this process, we are firmly placed in the circle of *new code acceptance* (position five in Diagram

A). Once in this position, we are prepared to *ontologically participate* in the fiction. Because

new code acceptance is central to the type of engagement I hope to disclose, Chapter Three

focuses on its achievement and characteristics. *Persona* is the larger focus of this chapter

because earlier criticism of the film lends itself to describing the reasons for and qualities of new

codes. Moreover, the irrational elements of the film that require us to adopt new codes are more

obvious than similar elements in *Absalom*.

As Rosa's narrative (addressed at length in Chapter Two) comes to a sudden close, the

"master organizer" plucks us from the inner circles of the dartboard, and yet a part of our

knowing remains there. At his pivotal moment, our engagement with the text is strengthened

partly because it is both foregrounded and restructured. Though we have been struck back into

identification with the narrator, we cannot be unconditioned to our emerging position (position

five – *new code acceptance*) within the system of engagement. Moreover, a part of our

consciousness remains in the inner circles, but in a new and different way. We know we have

and will continue to identify sometimes with characters, sometimes with the narrator, and even sometimes with universal concepts. However, the narration forces us to consciously and predominantly acknowledge that we only identify with these elements of the fiction through the novel – words, letters, pages. We are acutely aware that the thing we hold in our hands is the outlet to all of the missing elements of natural language responsible for connecting the narratives and characters and concepts to one another. The text and film radically foreground the formerly subtle process, which conditioned us to suspend disbelief while acknowledging our awareness of the artificiality of the construct.

As we saw in Chapter Two, cyclical repetition (with variations) of narratives gives rise to the sensation of "already knowing" new articulations in the novel. Part of what we discover we already know about the novel is that we are a part of it: we are an essential component of its existence. Additionally, because we have been conditioned to the sensation of "already knowing," we feel as if we already knew and yet were surprised that the narration would pluck us from *inside* (in) Quentin's mind (Alma and Elisabet's story) and replace us *with* (next to) the construct as a whole from the narrator/cameraman's perspective (for a while).[43] As we become more cognitively aware of what the narration communicates to us, we already know it:

> there is some co-understanding [between us and the novel]
>
> beforehand of what is said-in-the-talk; for only so is there a
>
> possibility of estimating whether the way in which it is said
>
> is appropriate to what the discourse is about thematically.
>
> (*Being and Time* 207)

---

[43] Considered in light of the "discourse" of fiction, this being *with* the construct is akin to what Heidegger refers to in the following: "In discourse Being-with becomes 'explicitly' *shared*; that is to say, it *is* already, but it is unshared as something that has been taken hold of and appropriated" (Heidegger 205).

In *Absalom*, our sensation of being able to articulate something we have known for some time is now concomitant with the sense we have had of already knowing the narratives presented to us in the text.[44] As a result, one "new code" we subconsciously accept is a product of the cyclical representation of narratives as well as our return to our position on the outer ring of the dartboard: we seem to already know everything the narration presents to us, as well as how it *will be* presented. This new code is a component of a second: understanding comes not only through a character's narrative, not only through natural language or the absence thereof, not only through a sort of "thoughtless knowing," but from a combination of these things projected from a construct. It is the construct with which we are now forced to empathize and with which we must now engage.[45]

We have been forced to recognize how the novel and the film are communicating to us and how that communication is frustrated by its own ineptitude. We can now clearly see that the structure of engagement no longer involves merely *identification*, *sympathy*, or *empathy* with certain characters or events in the fiction. Rather, it has moved through to *acceptance of new codes*, which will lead to participation in the fiction's ontology. The work of art is incapable of articulating its message through intelligible significations without our cooperation in "giv[ing] shape to the swirl of sensations to provide the springboard from which the subject leaps off and finally arrives at a 'world'" (Heidegger 207). As critical receivers, we came to the fiction with a "co-understanding" of the discourse between ourselves and the text/film. When the novel refuses the empathic connection we have enjoyed with Quentin, our "answering counter-discourse arises proximally and directly from understanding what the discourse [of reading fiction] is about,

---

[44] See Chapter 2.

which is already 'shared' in Being-with" the novel and all of its significations (*Being and Time* 207).

In *Persona*, narrative interruption is more overt than it is in *Absalom*. And, as I noted in Chapter Two, it is ushered in with violence. When we are wholly engaged in the relationship developing between Alma and Elisabet, the elaborate system of engagement sustained somewhere in our subconscious, Alma places Elisabet in harm's way with a piece of glass. We no longer consider actively how we came to view the two women (via the camera, via the boy, via the screen images, via identifications and alignments constantly in flux). We instead engage in their relationship to one another. We alternately identify with both of them for different reasons. As David Boyd notes:

> Elisabet is immediately established as the patient, the puzzle, the
>
> problem to be solved, [so] it necessarily follows that . . . it is with
>
> Alma, accordingly, that we initially identify. (Boyd 13)

However, we also identify with Elisabet, who "serves as a surrogate on screen, sitting as a silent spectator in the dark" (Boyd 14). Like us, Elisabet is an auditor of Alma's story. Elisabet's awareness of us, the viewers, problematizes this identification in much the same way as the boy's awareness of us problematized our identification with him at the beginning of the film. He reached out and touched us: she pops up and photographs us. Much like *Absalom's* cyclical reminders of our process of engagement, Elisabet photographing us creates a sense of pastiche[46] in the film. This serves as a subtle reminder of our journey toward the center of the dartboard.

---

[45] In Chapter 2, I established another predominant code created through our engagement with the novel involving our acceptance of everything in the fiction as *real* within the fictional space In Chapter 2, I utilized David Boyd's claim that we must give everything an "equivalent degree of reality."

[46] Jameson notes that pastiche is a fictional technique whereby the audience has a sensation of feeling sensations they have felt before. While his focus is on an entire work of art producing this sensation through familiar tropes, themes, and styles from past works of art, the technique is functionally the same but (in this case) within one work of art.

We are reminded of both where we were and of how far we have come to arrive back at the same point on the hermeneutic loop.

Critics of *Persona*, however, (like critics of *Absalom*) often focus more on interpretation than on process. They approach the first half of the film as:

> That section of the film to which many viewers and critics . . .
>
> cling so desperately because of the apparent familiarity of its
>
> fictional rhetoric and, in particular, . . . because of the absence . . .
>
> of anything "to distance or distract us from a moral and
>
> psychological exploration of the characters and their relationships,
>
> via the emotional-intellectual processes through which we
>
> customarily experience fictional narratives." (Boyd 13)

This analysis discounts a major portion of the "first half" of the film: the means by which we entered into the narrative between Elisabet and Alma.[47] When dealing with the opening scenes, Boyd discusses their possible meanings exhaustively to an ambiguous end. He discovers primarily that they resist meaning. Though he still insists on deeming *Persona* a film of interpretation (contrary to what I suggest), he recognizes that this "appropriation" is "either justified or not by the possibilities it subsequently opened up" (Boyd 18). When he acknowledges the entire film's effect on him as a viewer, he inadvertently addresses the purpose of its first and subsequent sequences:

> I assume a *persona* as clearly as Alma does. I call myself "the
>
> audience," "the viewer," "the critic," "the interpreter," or
>
> sometimes "we." . . . By exposing the inevitable absence of

adequate grounds for interpretive choice within the text,

deconstruction performs a necessary function *within a larger and*

more ambitious critical project, by forcing us to a closer scrutiny

of the real conditions (ideological, psychological, methodological)

under which that complex drama is actually performed.

(my emphasis Boyd 18)

The opening sequence of *Persona* and the first narratives in *Absalom* immediately reduce

us to an inadequate component of the fiction, unable to assume any one particular persona.

Instead, we discover that we assume a number of personas, all of which possess a wealth of

preconceived ideologies. We participate from the outset in a process that foregrounds the "real

conditions (ideological, psychological, methodological) under which that complex drama is

actually performed," though I place greater stress on the ideological and methodological

conditions than on the psychological conditions at work. Further, the film (and the novel) do not

only foreground the extant ideological conditions under which the work of art is received, they

also foreground how our newly incipient ideologies reduce the significance of those conditions.

While they are still a fundamental part of the reading experience, they become less salient. The

introductory segments of *Persona* and *Absalom* initiate a process whereby the "ideological

overcoding" we have brought to the reading experience functions both in its original state at one

and the same time as it restructures itself. When we reencounter the "master organizer" midway

through the work of art, the restructuring of ideologies takes hold, allowing us to embrace one of

the film's dominant characteristics: "While relativism is a position that one can entertain, . . . it

---

[47] As Susan Sontag posits, "Any account which leaves out or dismisses as incidental how *Persona* begins and ends hasn't been talking about the film that Bergman made" (Sontag, "Persona," 138).

is not a position one can occupy"[48] (Boyd 18). We cannot achieve heightened engagement with

the fiction and simultaneously maintain a relativistic set of ideals. Like anthropological

investigations, a phenomenological approach to engagement leads from "the particular to the

universal" (Levi-Strauss 22). By leading from the particular to the universal, *Absalom* and

Persona inspire us to think correspondingly. I will address this at length in Chapter Four.

Boyd's ultimate reaction to *Persona* opens his critique up to its inherently universal

elements. He endorses Stanley Fish's argument that

> no one can achieve the distance from his own beliefs and
>
> assumptions that would result in their being no more authoritative
>
> *for him* than the beliefs and assumptions held by others, or, for that
>
> matter, the beliefs and assumptions he himself used to hold.
>
> (Boyd 18)

Complete distance from our beliefs is not required, however. An appropriate comportment

toward the film does not necessarily involve the "authoritative[ness]" of the receiver's (or anyone

else's) original beliefs and assumptions. Rather, it involves her ability to maintain a certain

ambiguity, a sort of sustained ambivalence, of any beliefs or assumptions whatsoever. Our

"ideological overcoding" works concomitantly with the ideologies originated by the fiction.

Consider Claude-Levi Strauss's assertion:

> Whatever their true origin . . . divergent interpretations come from
>
> individual consciousness not as the result of objective analysis but
>
> rather as complementary ideas resulting from hazy and

---

[48] Heidegger, whose concepts help illustrate the way we engage with *Absalom* and *Persona*, is also opposed to relativism, particularly when one engages in a phenomenological analysis.

unelaborated attitudes which have an experiential character for

each of us. (Levi-Strauss 171-2)

When we return to our original position *with* (next to) the "story," identifying with the

narrator/cameraman, we presumably "discover" our "hazy and unelaborated attitudes." Among

them are those involving our "co-understanding" of the discourse with which we engage. We

need not articulate all of our hazy and unelaborated attitudes. We need only recognize that they

do, in fact, strike through our reading experience. This recognition is an essential step toward

our acceptance of the new ideologies established by the fiction, and those ideologies are

components of the world developing between ourselves and the fiction. Of course, we cannot

minimize the grasp of our pre-existing ideologies until we become at least subconsciously aware

of their existence. Again, a Heideggerian concept helps illustrate this notion:

> Under the strongest pressure and resistance, nothing like an affect
>
> would come about, and the resistance itself would remain
>
> essentially undiscovered, if Being-in-the-world, with its state-of-
>
> mind, had not already submitted itself to having entities within-the-
>
> world "matter" to it in a way which its moods have outlined in
>
> advance. *Existentially* [the] *state-of-mind* [we must have as we
>
> receive the work of art] *implies a disclosive submission to the*
>
> *world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us.*
>
> (*Being and Time* 177)

What "matters to us" is the apparatus of the fiction: the construct matters more at this moment

than does the story being told by the fiction. By extension, what "matters to us" also consists in

three co-existing modes of being *toward* the fiction: (1) that involving the pre-existing

ideologies we have brought to the fiction which we have encountered and therefore (presumably) learned to utilize and discount appropriately; (2) that involving the ideologies, which are a result of our engagement with the construct and become aspects of the world developing between ourselves and the fiction; and (3) that involving our subconscious awareness (in Heideggerian terms, our "inauthentic" awareness) of the questions evolving within that world. And ultimately, those *questions* will be what *primarily* "matter" to us.

By incorporating these new ideologies into our experience of the fiction, we enable ourselves to approach this break in the narrative in a specific way. At the moment narrative momentum breaks down (when the narrative voice interjects in Rosa's story; when the film strip breaks down in Alma and Elisabet's story), we must resist re-interpretation of the first half of the novel/film in order to totally engage with the fiction. Our temptation to reinterpret the first half the fiction would stem largely from our "need to explain the present events by their history [,which] . . . coexists with [our] need to keep up with them as they pull [us] forward into an indeterminate future" (Porter 245). However, we do not reinterpret them because our newly evolving ideologies forbid it. Therefore, we resist this temptation, for we do not *need* to explain current events by their history, nor do we need to articulate the world into which they will deliver us. As I have argued, Faulkner was not necessarily aware of where *Absalom* was going,[49] and Bergman readily admits:

> On many points [in *Persona*] I am uncertain and at one point at
>
> least I know nothing at all. I discovered that . . . . what I wrote or

included in the final film . . . was bound to be entirely arbitrary.

(Persona and Shame 21)

In order to maintain heightened engagement with the fiction, we should receive it accordingly.

And we possess this ability due to the conditioning we have undergone that has led to our at least

subconscious awareness of what the discourse expects from us (the second "mode of being

toward the fiction" noted above). Most importantly, our re-placement on the dartboard in a

position that foregrounds the construct originates a subconscious awareness of the journey

toward heightened engagement we will take again. This pre-cognition is what matters, and not a

specific interpretation of the fiction.

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[49] As Paisley Livingston notes, "Effective intentions are not necessarily conscious, nor are they a matter of an author's future-directed musing about what he or she may eventually write" (Livingston 106).
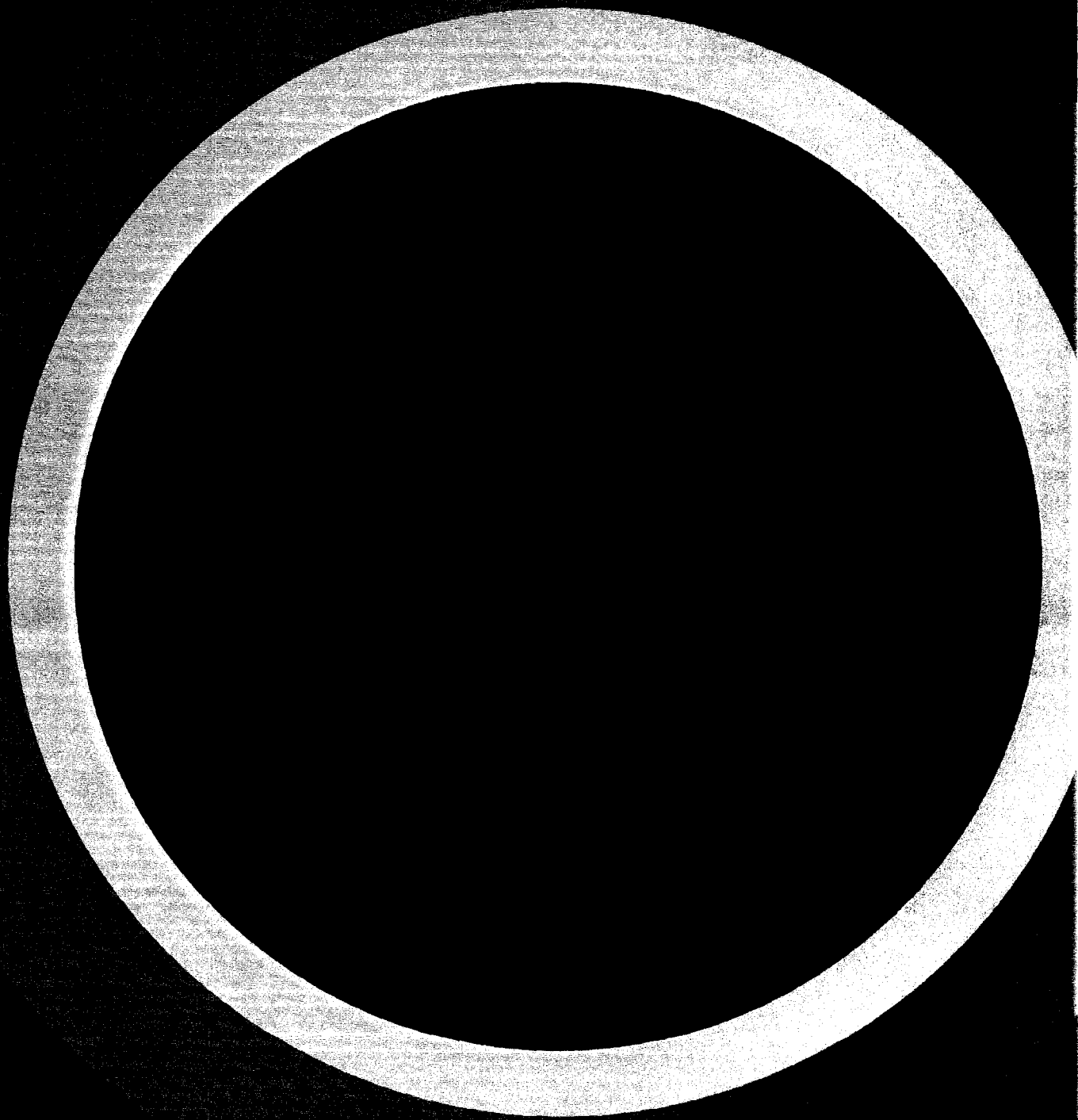
CHAPTER FOUR

Ontological Participation: The Result of the Hermeneutic

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
                    T.S. Eliot

Both the ideological overcoding we bring to the fiction, as well as the ideologies we

adopt as a result of reading the fiction, work together to help foster our most involved

engagement with the work. In Chapter Three, I offered a brief illustration of how the fiction

encourages us to recognize and restructure our ideologies and suggested that both the recognition

and restructuring are part of a conditioning process. Chapter Four focuses on how we can

experience reading the fiction after we have successfully completed this part of the conditioning

process.

The conditioning process leads us to a new level of engagement with the text. We will

proceed through to the inner two circles on the dartboard (*ontological participation* and

narration) largely because we can comfortably recollect our conditioned senses of *identification*,

alignment, *sympathy*, and *empathy* with characters and other aspects of the fiction. The

beginning of the second half of the fiction marks the return to the first point on a hermeneutic

loop. As we begin a second hermeneutic, working our way back through the different circles of

the dartboard toward *narration*, we do so on a deeper level than we did the first time. The

narration no longer focuses on engaging its audience with the story or stories it tells. Rather, the

"master organizer" focuses on the fiction as an entire entity aware of its ability to transcend itself

only with the participation of an audience that will bestow "an equivalent degree of reality" upon

all of its constructed narratives. Our engagement, now well beyond the point of identifying,

sympathizing, and empathizing with specific aspects of the fiction, positions us to ask questions

not only about characters and incidents, but also about the fiction as a whole. The modes of

engagement we have established through the process do not fall away. On the contrary, they are

wholly embraced and therefore secondary to the larger questions implied by the fiction.

Ultimately, our heightened engagement will lead to ontological participation in the novel.

When we encounter Chapter 6 in *Absalom*, we are faced yet again with what seems to be

the absence of explanatory passages in the text. Reading, "There was snow on Shreve's overcoat

sleeve, his ungloved blond square hand red and raw with cold, vanishing," we realize that we are

about to receive a narrative which seems discordant with everything we have encountered in the

novel (*AA* 141). Having been conditioned to "notlanguage" by the novel through Rosa's

narrative and through the narration as a whole, we will continue forward despite the obvious

break in the narrative.[50] The novel communicates with us at this point of fracture in the narrative

precisely through its silence. If we consider the way we communicate in our day-to-day lives, we

can perhaps understand this more easily. For example, most of us have likely experienced

moments in which our interlocutor's silence communicates far more to us than words: a silence

filled with love, with hate, with gratitude. These silences occur largely because both parties are

comfortable that they have a common understanding of their discourse. Heidegger has paid

special attention to this concept:

> In talking to one another, the person who keeps silent can make
>
> one 'understand' (that is, he can develop an understanding), and he
>
> can do so more authentically than the person who is never short of
>
> words . . . To be able to keep silent, Dasein [the fiction] must have

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[50] In *Persona*, stress is placed on "silence" from the outset.

something to say—that is, it must have at its disposal an authentic

and rich disclosedness of itself. (*Being and Time* 208)

I argue that the novel itself is able to keep silent about how we have moved from one place and

time to another, or even from one world to another, because it has "at its disposal an authentic

and rich disclosedness of itself." It is confident that we will be able to articulate its message. We

are surprisingly comfortable with what happens at this moment and, therefore, less likely to arrest

progression by flipping back through the novel in a futile attempt to discover who "Shreve" is

and why it is snowing. Our phenomenological experience of reading the text is not disrupted by

the fracture, for the fracture is a typical, understood characteristic of the fiction.

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger investigates a number of the concepts central to a

"phenomenological approach" to engagement with *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Persona*. As we

have seen in the preceding chapters, his concepts are often applicable through each progressive

circle on the dartboard, as his ontological project helps illustrate the means and characteristics of

our journey toward the center. I specifically locate the most relevant components of Heidegger's

project within the circle of *ontological participation* in the fiction. "The [receiver] who 'cannot

hear' and 'must feel'" is she who will make this leap into the circle of ontological participation

with the fiction precisely because she has experienced "being-with" the novel/film intuitively,

both before she began receiving it and even more so when she encounters the second half

(Heidegger 207). While I would not suggest that *Absalom* and *Persona* are "Heideggerian" per

se, the concepts Heidegger discusses as he attempts to phenomenologically "uncover" how we, as

humans, relate to the world in which we live helps illustrate the way we relate to these fictions.

These concepts also help illustrate the way the fiction relates *to itself* with our participation.

What is significant about *Absalom* and *Persona* in this respect is that they establish in us an acute

awareness of our "being-with" the work of art; that is, they cause us to recognize how we relate to the work.

Surprisingly, however, our awareness of the construct does not break down the structure of engagement, but rather reinforces it. Essentially, the fiction has caused us to address the construct "inauthentically" through the first half. In the second half, the fiction causes us to address it more actively because we are sufficiently engaged with the stories it tells to move out beyond them. The more frequently the fiction self-reflexively stresses our location *inside* the fictional space, the more actively we consider our implication therein, as well. Even though we are not necessarily aware of it at first, we become a part of the now foregrounded ontology of the fiction. The unwritten questions that emanated from Quentin's character and us *as one* will evolve into questions asked by the entire novel and us as complementary aspects of one world. The questions arise out of our shared consciousness, not unlike the repeated narrative that issues from Alma and Elisabet *as one*. And the questions, as well as the fictional realities that would seem epistemologically impossible in the world we inhabit outside the fiction, constitute dominant aspects of the fiction's ontology.

Heidegger's project consists partly in attributing to a being, which he calls "Dasein" three fundamental, existential qualities. The first is that it is a being capable of questioning its own being: "In its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it . . . Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being" (Heidegger 32). Another existential quality of Dasein is that it is radically characterized by finitude. "Dasein" (human beings are Dasein) is stricken through with death: *"Death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possiblity—non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped"* (*Being and Time* 303). Though there are many other existential qualities of Dasein upon which

Heidegger focuses, I will address only one other at this time. That is, Dasein has a "world" toward which it comports itself in certain ways, some of which I have already addressed such as "Being-with," "Being-in," the ability to engage in a "discourse," and "co-understanding," which is a product of Being-with. These Heideggerian concepts help clarify some of the more abstract ideas I purport about our "ontological participation" with the fiction.

I will now draw closer attention to the "world" developing between ourselves and the fiction I have addressed above. This evolving world has certain aspects, which are neither a part of the world in which we live outside of the text/film (in which we are used to comporting ourselves toward fiction in a certain way[51]), nor a part of the "story" told within the fictional world. Rather, this evolving world's ontological dominant derives partly from a combination of three entities: (1) the construct/fiction, which has begun to question its own Being (its Being is clearly an "*issue*" for it)[52]; (2) the characters within the fiction; and (3) the Dasein that receives the fiction. In Chapter Two, I noted that this world between the receiver and *Absalom* is a sort of vacuum (which seems to be both Quentin's mind and the construct represented through Quentin's mind) into which its different entities plunge. As Michel Foucault claims, "In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears" (Foucault 102). I argue that we, the receivers, also disappear into that space initially, until we "recollect" where we are. Once drawn into this space, however, we will eventually discover that it is less a vacuum than a world, containing the aspects described above, that operates in a specific way. So now if we consider that all three of these entities are aspects of one world, what

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[51] In the cases of Faulkner and Bergman, it is useful to stress the way we are used to comporting ourselves toward what is often considered "high modernist" fiction.
[52] While this is especially obvious in *Persona*, it will become more obvious in the last third of *Absalom*.

happens when we become acutely aware that a quality we normally attribute to one of these entities can be attributed to another simultaneously? Moreover, what transpires when the way these qualities are shared is emphasized by the fiction with such rapidly increasing frequency that we become consciously aware of their shared*ness*?

For example, as critical readers/viewers, we know that the fictional world is actualized by the receiver.[53] We could almost say that the fiction *as received* has *finitude* as one of its existential qualities. We will, indeed, *remember* what we have read and, perhaps more importantly, we assume others will read it far longer than we will exist as living, breathing humans. However, our peculiar mode of existence *as we receive* the fiction and the way the fictional space is our *world* as we receive it will end. Our time with the fiction in our hands or before us on the screen is finite, rendering that particular shared world between ourselves and the fiction finite. Because every person who receives the fiction will receive it in a particular way, at a particular moment, and with a particular understanding of what is said[54] in the fiction, and every person's existence is finite, then each particular fiction received is finite. The Rosa I conceive only inheres as long as I exist. So, it follows that my (I am a finite being) participation in the reading of the novel has caused the *me* that reads the novel as well as the *characters* within it to become Dasein that have a world in which they are finite. This is not at all a new concept, for critics such as Barthes and Foucault long ago established that the world of the fiction (and the characters within that world) are actualized only if they are read. What is critical in the cases of *Absalom* and *Persona*, however, is the increasing frequency with which they foreground our

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[53] Consider Eco, Chapter 2.
[54] Consider Heidegger's notion that "In any talk or discourse, there is *something said-in-the-talk* as such . . . whenever one wishes, asks, or expresses oneself about something. In this 'something said', discourse communicates" (205).

involvement (in this way) in the fiction. Moreover, our involvement with the fiction and the characters in the fiction is peculiar in a way that will become clearer as I proceed.

Let us take another ontological example of how the fiction itself emphasizes our relationship to it. Again, Heidegger's arguments about the existential characteristics that make us "Dasein" help elucidate this second example of our relationship to the fiction. At the moment the narrative voice interjects in *Absalom*, we experience a sort of little death, for the part of us that co-existed with Quentin has essentially died. Not surprisingly, the word "dead" is uttered twice in Quentin's mind at this moment. First, the word appears while we are still in Quentin's mind receiving Rosa's story: *"'Dead?' I cried. 'Dead? You? You lie; you're not dead; heaven cannot, and hell dare not, have you!'"* (*AA* 139). Then, as the "we" who were Quentin die with the narrator's interjection, the word appears again: *"Because he's dead./ Dead?/ Yes. I killed him"* (*AA* 139-41). While we may not have been aware that we shared consciousness with Quentin, this interjection brings it to the very edge of cognition. Though it is still "covered-up,"[55] it will soon be unveiled. It begins forcing our recognition that our relationship to Quentin involves sharing his thoughts and even actualizing some of those thoughts *for* him. But that privilege is not absolute. It is a gift the narration offered us for a while. If we consider this in light of Heidegger, we see parallels that help define the ontology of the novel.

Firstly, our finitude in the real world mirrors the finitude of life in the fictional space. In the world outside the fiction, we die. A character in the story proper is also finite, so our alignment with the character is finite. Therefore, the *we* that shared a consciousness with Quentin is finite. Whether or not the novel's existence endows Quentin with a sort of

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[55] Heideggerian term referring to those things that we know intuitively or subconsciously but that we do not consciously, resolutely consider or understand.

immortality,[56] the being that consists partly of me and partly of Quentin has experienced a little death. Once again, it is not relevant whether we recognize this transcendence (from "us/Quentin" to "us reading about Quentin") on a conscious level at this point. It seems odd that transcendence should move us backward, away from the text, less a part of the fiction. We must not forget, however, that we transcended ourselves in order to share consciousness with Quentin in the first place. We know, on some level, how to be *inside*. This conditioned response transforms itself into an intuitive awareness of how we should engage with the novel. We no longer rely upon alignment with Quentin to draw us in. The consciousness we have shared with Quentin is not the issue: what matters is the way we *feel* while we are inside his mind, the almost uncanny sense of being inside a place we have been before (perhaps all of our lives) and intuitively possessing all of the knowledge this new and yet familiar mind possesses (once again, this sense stems partly from the cyclical repetition of narratives). In fact, *Absalom* will overtly bring this sharedness to conscious thought later in the novel. For now, the model reader continues reading with what Heidegger might call "activity in passivity" in order that transcendence can descend upon her "like a snowfall through which she perceives only muted sounds and blurred images." Because we are not consciously aware of our transcendence, Heidegger might suggest that it is "covered-up." The text will provide us with clues, however, which will help us "uncover" it. The transition into the narrator's perspective is one among a series of similar transitions that occur more rapidly as we continue forward with the second half of the novel (and the film). We know and yet seem to forget within moments that the transition has taken place, but we will immediately encounter another instance in which narrative momentum breaks down (though in a different way) intensifying the *sensation* of transition.

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[56] i.e.: In the 18th century, storytellers once thought that the hero who was willing to die was given immortal life by the retelling

Part of the reason we quickly forget the transition from inside the Rosa narrative to the narrator's perspective is because we immediately confront another transition. As we begin reading Chapter 6, we cannot but notice that it has transported us into a completely new fictional space. It seems the only constant is the narration's inconsistency. As noted above, there are no words, no narrated language, to guide us into the dorm-room at Harvard. Moreover, signification in the novel is problematized yet again, for italics once again represents a written letter (from Mr. Compson to Quentin). In Chapter Two, we established that we relate to written letters in our world outside the fiction (the world in which we live) as real entities written by real people in the real world. So, now we find ourselves asking: "What am I to do with these italicized words in this world of ambiguous significations? Is this Quentin's mind again? Am I inside again? Is the fictional character holding a piece of paper? Remembering one?" And again, the letter itself announces death, the death of Rosa whose story we received through Quentin's mind. Mr. Compson describes death:

> *The only painless death must be that which takes the intelligence*
>
> *by violent surprise and from the rear so to speak since if death be*
>
> *anything at all beyond a brief and peculiar emotional state of the*
>
> *bereaved it must be a brief and likewise peculiar state of the*
>
> *subject as well . . . . a slow and gradual confronting with that*
>
> *which over a long period of bewilderment and dread it has been*
>
> *taught to regard as an irrevocable and unplumbable finality.*
>
> (*AA* 141)

of the story (Foucault 102).

Reading this passage, how can we but consider the way we relate to death in our world outside the fiction? We are always "being-towards-death," as Heidegger suggests. Indeed, the death we experience through our alignment with Quentin took our "intelligence by violent surprise and from the rear so to speak," and yet we surely knew intuitively that this would occur. In this case, the fiction itself reminds us that our experience of reading it will end, just as we know everyday that our experience of living in the world will end. We tend to ignore day-to-day the fact that we will die:

> Our everyday falling evasion *in the face of* death is an inauthentic
>
> Being-*towards*-death. But inauthenticity is based on the possibility
>
> of authenticity. Inauthenticity characterizes a kind of Being into
>
> which Dasein can divert itself and has for the most part diverted
>
> itself; but Dasein does not necessarily and constantly have to divert
>
> itself into this kind of Being.   (*Being and Time* 303)

In a sense, this is the way we read fiction. We know our experience of the fictional world will end, and yet we suspend that notion – "cover it up," so to speak – in order to receive it in a certain way. If we assume Mr. Compson's projection about Rosa's experience is accurate, (as the fiction has conditioned us to do), then this is another quality shared between a character in the fiction and us. Not only do we presumably share this notion of death as experienced in our world outside the fiction, but we have also shared it inside the fiction as our alignment with Quentin is severed. Finally, the very act of reading inspires a similar modus operandi through which we cover-up the finitude of our experience. But as Heidegger states, "Inauthenticity is based on the possibility of authenticity." *Absalom* and *Persona*, by bringing these unconscious strategies to the surface in the fiction itself, will ultimately cause us to think about what, in fact, we are

engaging with and how we engage with it. Once again, we engage with the entire fiction, not merely characters, events, or concepts within the fiction. Eventually, we, as model receivers, will authentically recollect the way we have engaged with the fiction.

We accept the way the narration functions in Chapter 6 largely because we are conditioned to the sensation of transition. We are also inauthentically aware of the sensation of *transcendence*. Gradually, the *narration* will begin to transcend itself, and we may not even notice the transcendence because we are so accustomed to it. Partway through the letter from Mr. Compson, it abruptly stops and the narration returns us to the dorm-room in which Quentin reads it. As the narrator describes Quentin's experience of listening to Shreve, Quentin begins to assume a shared existence with Henry. Though exceedingly subtle at this point, the narration provides clues as to what will occur. The narrative voice often delivers messages parenthetically as though it lacks the capacity to neatly deliver its message. The use of pronouns becomes more frequent and proper names become an aside. This causes us to question exactly who experiences what in the fiction at one and the same time as it causes us to recognize that it does not matter. What matters is the way the narration relates to the story it tells. In fact, the narration itself delivers the story in the dorm-room as though it is sometimes trapped in Quentin's consciousness but is still able to distinguish Quentin's "out loud" thoughts (represented, once again, by italics). When Quentin's mind ostensibly wonders from the conversation he has with Shreve, the narration is forced to go with him. The narration, however, is not *in* his mind, only *with* it, reflecting the way we comport ourselves in "Being-*with*" the fiction. Consider what occurs in the following section:

> . . . that very September evening when Mr Compson stopped
>
> talking at last, he (Quentin) walked out of his father's talking at

last because it was now time to go . . . [and] he had something

which he was still unable to pass: that door, that gaunt tragic

dramatic self-hypnotised youthful face like the tragedian in a

college play, an academic Hamlet waked from some trancement of

the curtain's falling and blundering across the dusty stage from

which the rest of the cast had departed last commencement, the

sister facing <u>him</u> across the wedding dress . . . And she (Miss

Coldfield) had on the shawl, as <u>he</u> had known she would.   (my

emphasis *AA* 142)

We would likely assume that Quentin is remembering these circumstances. But we also know

that italics represent Quentin's thoughts whenever the narrative voice is present. While it is

likely that the first "him" I have underlined refers to Henry, the second is slightly more

ambiguous, though we will soon discover it refers to Quentin. The narrative has violently

removed us from dorm-room/1885 Yoknapatawpha County (the two places gradually become

one largely because the narration itself has a difficult time distinguishing between them) to

September 1909, on the road to Sutpen's Hundred. The ambiguous signification of personal

pronoun 'he' in turn imbues successive 'he's and 'him's with an overarching ambiguity that

persists throughout the remainder of the novel. In the same way that the narration is *with*

Quentin's consciousness, we have been *with* the fiction. So whether conscious of it or not, we

intuitively accept its ambiguities, as they have persisted from the outset and become more

dominant.

Ambiguity is a dominant characteristic of the fiction we are conditioned to accept. For

example, part of what we accept about the novel is that we receive slight variations on repeated

narratives from different sources, all of which should be taken as fact. The origin of the stories told, or perhaps more specifically, the narrator, is often ambiguous. In *The Portable Faulkner*, Malcolm Cowley calls attention to the "errors" in *Absalom*, and I think he is referring, at least in part, to instances such as: open quotes that are never closed; inconsistent representation of movements from one place, time, or perspective to another; or even chronologically and spatially impossible circumstances. (This last will become central to the novel as Shreve and Quentin's project their narrative, as well as the narrator's response to it.) I would argue that these are not "errors" but rather part of what we learn to accept about the novel's ontology. As Heidegger suggests (put simply), one cannot know where one is going if one is to succeed with a phenomenological project. Similarly, as Faulkner may not have know exactly where he was going at all times (unlike, for example, James Joyce with *Ulysses*), inconsistencies are inevitable. They make the fiction more fundamentally authentic, and therefore make our engagement with it stronger. In Being-with the novel, we accept this: Being-*with* the novel and its ontological characteristics will lead to Being-*in* the world projected by the fiction.

The novel's consciousness stems from the combined insights of the narration, Quentin, and us. Because we recognize that Quentin's stream-of-consciousness moves the narration forward and backward in time and space, we are not surprised when we encounter the following transition:

> He (Quentin) agreeing to this, sitting in the buggy beside the
>
> implacable doll-sized old woman . . . thinking *Good Lord yes, let's*
>
> *dont find him or it, try to find him or it, risk disturbing him or it:*
>
> (then Shreve again, "Wait. Wait. You mean that this old gal, this
>
> Aunt Rosa----"

"Miss Rosa," Quentin said.   (*AA* 143)

Parenthetical, now, is the story being told by the narrator about the discussion between Quentin and Shreve. Foremost is the fiction itself that emanates from Quentin's consciousness represented sometimes in italics and sometimes in normal font. His consciousness originates the boundaries of the world we share with him.

As Quentin's consciousness delivers the italicized narrative, it is interrupted periodically by the narrator's account of what occurs in the dorm-room at Harvard. Frequent points of fracture move us from one place and time to another with Quentin's thoughts. Quentin is ostensibly the only character who has access to the entire Sutpen story via projections, old "mouth-to-mouth" tales, and personal experience. Additionally, his consciousness directs the "master organizer," or narration. Intuitively, we assume that the narration ultimately decides what we learn and when, and yet we sense that it is somehow unable to fulfill this charge alone. Therefore, we give increasingly more credence to the narrative issuing from the three sources named above: the narration, Quentin (and his consciousness), and us – the beings that actualize the fiction. Part of the reason we accept this "shared consciousness" is because the fiction has conditioned us to recognize that consciousness *can* be shared. Consider again Mr. Compson's projections about Henry and Rosa. Nothing in the novel suggests that he is *wrong*. In fact, the fiction suggests that he injects truth into the accounts of these characters' experiences. Now, as the narrator moves about with Quentin's thoughts, we are conditioned to assume these fractures and transitions, which are a product of the consciousness shared between Quentin and the narrator, are a necessary means by which to deliver the "true" story inside the fiction.

Shreve and Quentin's remarks occasionally guide the narrative to new places at which point they resume in the narrator's domain. What does this tell us about Shreve and Quentin?

About the fiction? For one thing, it tells us that the narrator *shares* consciousness with Shreve

and Quentin. It does not *know* their thoughts objectively enough to offer us a neat, linear

representation of them. Moreover, it tells us that the narrative cannot be presented *without* the

shared consciousness. It needs the Harvard boys' guidance. Finally, it tells us that the novel is

beginning to place greater emphasis on shared identities. If, as I have repeatedly noted, we must

confer an "equivalent degree of reality" upon everything in the fiction, then any narrative that

stems from a shared consciousness is subject to this ideology. Why do we submit to this

ideology even now, after the fiction (especially as represented through the narrator) has

seemingly doubted itself on so many occasions? Because we have been conditioned by the novel

to do so. We still maintain the engagement with the fiction that straddles every circle on the

dartboard through to ontological participation with the fiction (alignment, empathy, and so on)

only we now do so with the entire fiction. And the entire fiction is subject to the master

organizer (the narration), which moves about at the will of Quentin's consciousness. The only

entity capable of actualizing and articulating the larger questions issuing from Quentin's mind is

the receiver: Dasein.

As the narrator becomes less and less autonomous, he begins to share Quentin's doubts

and insecurities. Eventually, he slips into modes of being in which he *becomes* Quentin. So

subtle is this transcendence that it is almost unrecognizable. Note the peculiarity in the middle of

the following passage:

> It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see them: the ragged
>
> and starving troops without shoes, . . . the glaring eyes in which
>
> burned some indomitable desperation of undefeat, . . . and inert
>
> carven rock . . . moving behind the regiment in a wagon driven by

the demon's body servant . . . [to] where the daughter waited, . . .

where Miss Coldfield possibly (maybe doubtless) looked at it every

day as though it were a portrait, possibly (maybe doubtless here

too) reading among the lettering more . . . than she ever told

Quentin about . . . ; he could see it; he might even have been there.

Then he thought *No. If I had been there I could not have seen it*

this plain. (*AA* 154-5)

Who is uncertain here? Who is not sure about Miss Coldfield's actions? The parenthetical

notation certainly comes from the narrator, and yet the narrator was supposed to be providing us

access to Quentin's thoughts. The narrator lost himself in Quentin's mind such that the doubt he

experiences is both his own and Quentin's. Both are doubtful because the *fiction* is doubtful:

there is doubt in the world projected by the fiction.

Our (perhaps subconscious) doubt of the narrator's objectivity merely serves to augment

what is already a significant aspect of the fiction itself. Our doubt is more shared than injected

by us into the fiction, for our doubt rises up out of the narration's representation of doubt. At the

end of the passage, Quentin's "out-loud" thoughts are clear, and we assume they accurately

represent what he thinks: they are his real thoughts.[57] Oddly, therefore, it would seem that the

fiction is encouraging us to accept Quentin's thoughts as *real and accurate* and the narrator's

account of them (presented in regular font) as *doubtful*. But what has the novel long ago

conditioned us to accept? That each account of thoughts or situations is as real and accurate as

any other. Additionally, though Quentin's consciousness generally directs the narrator, we can

see that in the above passage, the narrator's account has led to Quentin's "out-loud" thought.

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[57] Remember what we have been conditioned to assume when we encounter italics (see Chapter 2).

They are interchangeable. Their consciousness is wholly shared. We, as receivers, are beginning to engage with the entire fiction as one whole entity, no component of which is more important to our reception than any other.

The narration carries us to different places and times partly due to Quentin's thoughts and partly due to the way the narrator conceives the discussion taking place between Quentin and Shreve at Harvard. As the narration returns to a past conversation between Quentin and his father, it gives us access to Quentin's thoughts again, only this time his thoughts are parenthetical: "*(who, not bereaved, did not need to mourn* Quentin thought, thinking *Yes, I have had to listen too long)*" (*AA* 157). Quentin knows consciously that he is losing himself in the narrative, in the Sutpen story. He knows that he is becoming part of it and that he will write it himself and be correct because he is *inside*. Not only does Quentin know this, the narrator knows it and therefore places his thoughts in parenthesis. And we who receive the fiction know he is becoming absorbed by the narration, as well. His thoughts no longer need to be central to the fiction with the narrator's passages in parenthesis. Why? Because Quentin knows he exists in the narration and the narration knows the story. Most importantly, the novel has renewed our alignment with Quentin but in a new and more expansive way.

We were once aligned with Quentin through our shared experience as audience. We experienced, partly through that alignment, empathy for other characters. Now, we are aligned with him through our implication in the fiction. Like Quentin, we are inside. We are actualizing the story inside the fiction such that our thoughts about the world outside the fiction are secondary, parenthetical. Unreservedly submitting to the ideologies set forth by the fiction, we model readers share a consciousness with the fiction. In the first half, it gave us space, acknowledged our critical position, and allowed us to move back and forth between our world of

experience and the world of the fiction. Because of this, we unconsciously submitted when it was drawing us in. Additionally, the ideologies it set forth about the world projected by the fiction have often been so similar to the intuitive (and perhaps "covered-up") ideologies of our experience of *being* outside the fiction, they actually bring us closer to our own being outside the fiction *through* the fiction. As Mr. Wilde would say, life has begun to imitate art. Characters inside the fiction are beginning to pass us on the phenomenological path toward uncovering our modes of being. In Chapter Two, I called attention to the following passage: "Out of these "words, . . . symbols, the shapes themselves, we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting" (*AA* 80). Now we can see that we are, in fact, dimly finding ourselves in the fiction, though perhaps not consciously. As characters look to us for actualization, we look to the fiction to actualize us, though not actively. Should we seek ourselves actively in the fiction, we will flee from the possible "us" therein. As Heidegger stresses, we cannot seek out our Being, we must allow Dasein to disclose itself to itself. From the universal passage uttered by Mr. Compson (see Chapter Two, page 34) to the finitude of living in the real world and of reading fiction (which we generally ignore), the novel as a whole has aligned itself with us. However, we are still at least subconsciously aware of everything the novel has conditioned us to acknowledge, not the least of which is the nature of the construct. Parenthetical though our thoughts about the world outside the fiction may be, the novel knows it needs us as much as the narrator knows he needs Quentin and vice versa.

Deep into Quentin's mind once again (pages 171-73), we are aligned with him in all of the ways we have been throughout the novel. Suddenly, his mind's voice addresses us/receiver, us/narrator, and us/Quentin all at once, violently tearing away our last shred of attachment to our world of experience:

But you were not listening, because you knew it all already, had

learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech

somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it, as

children will and do: so that what your father was saying did not

tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant

string of remembering, who had been here before . . .   (AA 172)

With these words, this mind addresses us as all three of the above beings, which together

comprise our current, singular Dasein. And the address positively explains the process we have

undergone: our phenomenological experience of the fiction. Everything the novel has done to

this point (repetition of narratives, projection of universal concepts, the hermeneutic, our

sensation of always "being-with" the fiction and the ideologies it gradually inspires us to adopt,

etc.) is summed up here the very moment consciousness looks directly at the "you" (the "I") that

exists both outside and inside of it. We know everything: so we know everything the fiction will

present to us is as real as the book itself. We are Quentin now. Just as Alma and Elisabet look

directly at us before (and while) they become one, so Quentin looks out at us now. All three

implicate us in their shared existences we will soon receive. And if we can find ourselves in the

fiction both through our own experience and through the experience of reading the fiction, we

have no reason to believe Alma cannot find herself in Elisabet, Shreve in Bon, Quentin in Henry.

When Quentin and Shreve begin to construct an elaborate story around what transpired

between Henry and Bon in 1865 (beginning around page 240), our conditioning process has

prepared us to receive it as a positive account. Further, their narrative act will lead to an event

that would have seemed impossible had we not been so conditioned. Let us consider the story

constructed by Quentin and Shreve in *Absalom* as an aspect of a "world" in which the narrative

act produces a "real" story upon which we confer as great a degree of reality as we do upon any other story or projection in the fiction. I stress again: the novel has conditioned us to recognize that even projected stories add truth the fiction. As Heidegger notes:

> The world which has already been disclosed beforehand permits
>
> what is within-the-world to be encountered. This prior
>
> disclosedness of the world belongs to Being-in and is partly
>
> constituted by one's state-of-mind. (*Being and Time* 176)

Our "state-of-mind" at this moment in the fiction derives from the way we have been conditioned by the fiction itself.[58] We acquiesce. We engage ontologically and not empirically or epistemologically. When Quentin and Shreve begin constructing the narrative, we are confronted with a *representation* of the world between the novel and ourselves *within* that very world. As they narrate their story, the narrator begins to sound less insightful, focusing only upon the very obvious "present-at-hand" aspects of the interlocutors and their discussion. In *Persona*, encountering this world involves a very immediate reflection back on the world itself, produced by re-viewing some of the clips we saw at the beginning of the film. The world to which Bergman exposes us with the filmstrip's breakdown and, subsequently, the repeated film clips is that world "which has already been disclosed beforehand" and therefore "permits what is within-the-world" to be encountered.[59] The hermeneutic is already complete. We know this place and have been here before. This time, however, we know it better. We know its boundaries, doubts, and insecurities. Therefore, we recognize that within this world, it is representing itself and

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[58] This is akin to what Paisley Livingston refers to as the "'intentional heuristic' that involves a search for those beliefs that the text's author or authors intended readers to adopt in making sense of the story" (Livingston 106).

[59] "The form was implicit in the film from the beginning, but now it is there, *articulate* and formidable, though it will be developed even further" (Campbell 75).

disclosing itself to itself through our participation, encouraging us to articulate the questions it asks of itself.

In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale draws attention to this point in *Absalom, Absalom!* where Quentin and Shreve begin projecting. He claims that when Quentin and Shreve begin constructing a narrative around the possible events that took place in 19th Century Yoknapatawpha County, the text foregrounds ontology by "deny[ing] the possibility of ontological grounding" (27). This lack of ontological grounding is a component of the *ontology* of the text. McHale's primary objective is to demonstrate that postmodernist texts ask the following questions, giving rise to "ontological superiority:"

> How is a projected world structured? . . . Which world is this?
>
> What is to be done with it? Which of my selves is to do it? . . .
>
> What happens when different worlds are placed in confrontation?
>
> McHale 11-13

Though this moment foregrounds *Absalom's* fundamental ontology, McHale fails to acknowledge how most of the narratives have been constructed throughout the novel. Consider, again, the various narratives we have read in *Absalom* and their ambiguous similarities. Like Cowley, McHale perceives these narratives as doubtful, but somehow grounded in epistemological possibility in the realm of the empirically "real." He would suggest that the text is fundamentally epistemological until this pivotal moment when Shreve and Quentin begin the narrative act. To McHale, this moment represents, "The dead-ending of epistemology in solipsism" (25). By extension, McHale claims that when Quentin and Shreve begin to "project a world," solipsism is transcended, "but only by shifting from a modernist poetics of epistemology to a postmodernist poetics of ontology . . . to the unconstrained projection of worlds in the

plural" (25). But isn't the world Quentin and Shreve project merely an extension of all the

projections that led up to it? Are they all not characterized by questions such as, "Which world is

this?" and "What am I to do with it?" At the very least, we have established that the first

question is constantly foregrounded by the narration, or "master organizer," itself.

In Chapters Two and Three, I discussed how we feel as though we "already know" Rosa's

story when we encounter it again in Quentin's mind. I also claimed that this story was the "true

story of which the narration was aware." Now we find the narration questioning its own fictional

possibilities. Since we have been conditioned to give "an equivalent degree of reality" to all

components in the text, we are prepared to do so when we enter Quentin and Shreve's dorm, and

inside the dorm, Quentin and Shreve will construct their narrative. The *process* we have

undergone in order to engage intuitively with the text affords the story Quentin and Shreve

project as great a degree of reality as any of the others. McHale considers the "jarring" effect of

moving from one world to the next a technique of ontological foregrounding. So it seems that he

perceives this moment in the text as a jarring transition from one world to another. But the world

projected by them is in fact only a representation of the world projected by the entire novel. Its

ideologies, boundaries, questionings, and doubts are the same. The transition into their narrative

is no more jarring than any of the others: it is but more recognizable.[60] It calls our attention to

the now obvious projections we have subconsciously accepted throughout the reading process.

The novel "discloses" itself to us, and we begin to uncover its world and its discourse. Because

we have been conditioned to embrace this moment, we will do so more willingly than we would

have in the first half of the novel. McHale overlooks the *process* that is central to the way we

engage with the novel. In fact, the 'world projected' by the novel is born of this process alone

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[60] Our ability to recognize it is akin to what Heidegger refers to as Dasein's ability to "recollect."

(and not merely by a story Quentin and Shreve construct), so that this moment merely foregrounds the novel's ontology consisting in our "thoughtless," or "submissive" cooperation with its significations.

We now actualize the novel/film through the consciousness shared among the narration (including the narrator), Quentin, and ourselves. This shared consciousness enables us to articulate the fiction's ontological questions, so we are now situated in the circle of *ontological participation* on the dartboard. Quentin's thoughts remind us of the shared*ness* to which we are conditioned by the fiction:

> *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* 210)

Every person, every narrative is a part of the other. In what I will call the "Harvard narrative," we receive our first positive account that Bon is Sutpen's son. But haven't we known this all along? What issues from this dorm-room is a positive account of the Sutpen story. At Harvard, italics represent the real because of the conditioning we have received. At one and the same time as they represent the real, italics represent thought, quotations, narrative voice, and hand-written letters. Quentin's "out-loud" thoughts are completed by Shreve. Mr. Compson's projections inform their narrative. Rosa's ghost injects language and intonation into the story. Grandfather Compson's pity sometimes seems ubiquitous. Every character shares these comportments simultaneously, dead or alive. Every character becomes every other character. As Quentin has made us a part of himself (with the narration's help), we all begin to narrate the same story. We are both outside the fiction enough to engage *with* it and inside enough to *narrate* it.

As they narrate, Quentin and Shreve become one. Similarly, in *Persona*, Alma and

Elisabet become one as they narrate (though Alma does the talking, the story issues from one

Dasein comprised of both women). Because we are less likely to imbue metaphorical

interpretations onto an image than we are to metaphorize language in a novel, it helps to consider

how readily we accept the story Alma constructs pertaining to Elisabet and her child. We begin

to accept that they are, in fact, one person and share a consciousness. We also perceive Quentin

and Shreve becoming one in *Absalom*:

> It was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which
>
> the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them
>
> (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of
>
> words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both:
>
> both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the
>
> thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the two of them
>
> creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales
>
> and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere,
>
> who, shadows, were shadow not of flesh and blood which had
>
> lived and died but shadows in turn of what were . . . shades too.
>
> (*AA* 243)

While many other texts might cause us to read these lines metaphorically, *Absalom* has

conditioned us to simply visualize the process in much the same way as we literally see it on the

screen in *Persona*.[61] The novel has established that a story becomes richer, truer, and more

complete when more characters offer their accounts. So it follows that the stories issuing from

Quentin/Shreve and Alma/Elisabet are imbued with greater truth than one that comes from a

singular character's perspective (by "singular," I mean a character that is a whole unto itself and

not half of a two-being whole):

> And in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and
>
> conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived—in order to
>
> overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency
>
> but nothing fault nor false. (*AA* 253)

And "nothing fault nor false" issues from the narrator/cameraman when the fiction employs the

ideologies it has itself created with our participation. As Alma makes love to Elisabet's husband

as Elisabet/Alma, we know that the ideologies and boundaries of this world permit such an

occurrence to take place. Moreover, we are implicated in this shared identity, for not only have

we actualized it, but it has addressed us directly. We need not question whether this is a

psychological (or psychotic) event. It simply *is*.

Similarly, though the process is longer and subtler in *Absalom*, its product is the same.

We encounter an otherwise irrational occurrence, but know that it is rational by this world's

definition. We read:

> Shreve ceased. That is, for all the two of them, Shreve and
>
> Quentin, knew he had stopped, since for all the two of them knew
>
> he had never begun, since it did not matter . . . which one had been
>
> doing the talking. 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—

---

[61] Faulkner's ability to foster images such as these probably owes partly to his familiarity with film. He might even have been

Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry, the two of them both believing

that Henry was thinking *He* (meaning his father) *has destroyed us*

all. (*AA* 267)

This is the fiction with which we engage. We needn't ask, "Is this possible?" We ask rather,

"How did I arrive here?" "What about this world is an issue for it?" "Is it able to transcend itself

with my participation?"

And the questions are what the fiction narrates, but we ask the questions, articulate them.

The questions dominate the fictions' ontologies. And we *narrate* the questions. We narrate.

---

visualizing something similar to what we see in *Persona*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summation: Within the World

Everything we have learned through the novel has not come from individual characters at individual moments in time and space. Rather, their words, thoughts, actions, have come down onto the paper all at once and disappeared when the book was set down. According to Susan Sontag, "Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all. . . . The function of criticism should be to show *how it is what it is* even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*" (Sontag 14). By accepting what the narrators have offered us as snippets of evidence, as descriptions of what occurred in the fictional space, we avoid interpreting them as symbols with "analogous derivations" in our world outside the fiction. We recognize and participate in the fiction's ontology.

The ontologies of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Persona* are characterized by our recollection of the questions the fictions themselves ask *about* themselves. Our recollection is made possible by the fictions' ability to disclose itself to itself. This occurs partly because I, Dasein, have disclosed myself to myself *as I exist in the world projected between myself and the fiction*. As an aspect of the fiction's ontology, I inject these questions into the fiction as it projects them out to me. In Lukacs's terms, these texts are aware of the following:

> A totality that can be simply accepted is no longer given to the
>
> forms of art: therefore they must either narrow down and volatise
>
> whatever has to be given form to the point where that can
>
> encompass it, or else they must show polemically the *impossibility*
>
> *of achieving their necessary object and the inner nullity of their*

own means. And in this case they carry the fragmentary nature of

the world's structure into the world of forms. (my emphasis 38-9)

Absalom, Absalom! and *Persona* condition their audiences to embrace the ideologies, boundaries, and characteristics of the worlds they project. Once absorbed into the novel/film's ontology, Dasein experiences the uncanny sense of recollecting its position when the fiction begins to question its own being in the second half. It questions its own being by projecting a representation of itself out from within the very world it projects. Now apart from itself, it can disclose itself to itself with Dasein's participation (with our participation). At this very moment, Dasein recollects the *now uncovered* world *beside* which and *with* which it has existed from the beginning of the fiction. And before.

Of course, Dasein existed before it began to receive the fiction. Dasein-*with* the fiction is Dasein-*in* the world outside the fiction. Dasein can uncover the world projected by the fiction not only because of what it has been *with* since it began *receiving* the fiction itself, but also because its phenomenological experience of the fiction has disclosed Dasein *to* itself. The fiction-receiving Dasein is comprised of both Dasein-in and Dasein-with the fiction. And as I established in Chapter Two, Dasein-*with* (in Chapter Two, I refer to this being as the receiver who exists in the world outside the fiction) must recollect the ideologies it brings to the fiction in order to employ and discount them as required. By the time Dasein-with the fiction finds itself wholly situated in a world that represents itself to itself, Dasein in turn discloses itself to itself *as an aspect of this world*. And as an aspect of this world, Dasein's function is to articulate the questions it asks about itself.

Finally, our (Dasein's) engagement with the fiction is not with its individual parts, but rather with its totality. Viewing *Persona*, we engage with the entire film, and:

The shadows would continue their game, even if some happy

interruption cut short our discomfort. Perhaps they no longer

need the assistance of the apparatus, the projector, the film, or the

sound track. They reach out towards our senses, deep inside the

retina, or into the finest recesses of the ear. Is this the case? . . .

That these shadows posses a power, that their rage survives

without the help of the picture frames, this abominably accurate

march of twenty-four pictures a second, twenty-seven metres a

minute. (Persona and Shame 93-4)

"Their rage" survives in the world between us and the screen, not because we engage with the

characters individually, but because we comport ourselves toward the very apparatus through

which we received them. This world's own representation of itself frees it of itself. As beings

whose world this is, we all, characters and receivers alike, survive without it. We exist not in the

apparatus, but in the world between the apparatus and ourselves of which the construct is only a

part.

As we read *Absalom, Absalom!*, we engage with the entire novel: letters, pages, words,

the faint spidery script not like something impressed upon the

paper by a once-living hand but like a shadow cast upon it which

had resolved on the paper the instant before [we] looked at it and

which might fade, vanish, at any instant while [we] still [do].

And in the end we discover that *we knew it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without*

the medium of speech somehow from having been born and living beside it, with it . . . : so that

what the narrators were saying did not tell us anything so much as it struck, word by word, the

resonant string of remembering, who had been here before . . .

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