

Narrative Voice and Racial Stereotypes in  
the Modern Novel: Joseph Conrad's *Lord  
Jim* and William Faulkner's *Absalom,  
Absalom!*

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*Per a qui ha viscut i crescut amb la tesi, en Josep M. i en Pere*



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## Abstract

This dissertation intends to demonstrate that Joseph Conrad's novel *Lord Jim* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* explore the narrative strategy of narrative voice, on the one hand, and racial stereotypes, on the other, in order to reflect upon the credibility of voice in fiction as well as the trustworthiness of racial discourse. Emerging from the historical ideological crisis that involved race relations in the late nineteenth-century British Empire, and in the 1930s U.S. South, the blending of these two aspects allowed an alternative and ambivalent representation of racial issues in fiction. The interrogation of credibility, very common in the Modern novel, results in these novels in a sophistication of the strategies that address the problem of narrative reliability, and of the use of racial stereotypes for narrative purposes—in other words, their conception as narrative forms. By paying attention to these two aspects, this thesis claims that it is in the analysis of their intertwining where we may find the expression of the historical tension born of complex race relations.

## Resum

Aquesta tesi vol demostrar que Joseph Conrad i William Faulkner, en les novel·les *Lord Jim* i *Absalom, Absalom!* respectivament, reflexionen sobre la credibilitat de la veu en la ficció i del discurs racial per mitjà de l'exploració tècnica de la veu narrativa i dels estereotips racials. Nascuda de les crisis històriques que giren al voltant de les relacions racials, patides al si de l'Imperi Britànic de finals del segle XIX i al Sud dels Estats Units durant la dècada de 1930, l'articulació d'aquests dos aspectes en les novel·les permet una representació de les qüestions racials que és innovadora i ambivalent. Certament, la interrogació de la credibilitat dels discursos, tan comú en la novel·la moderna, porta a la sofisticació tant de les estratègies narratives que exploren el problema de la fiabilitat en la ficció com de l'ús dels estereotips racials a dins de la narració, entesos, doncs, com a formes narratives. És justament en l'anàlisi de les correspondències entre els aspectes històrics i els aspectes formals on la tesi troba la manera complexa en què aquestes dues novel·les expressen les tensions racials pròpies dels contextos històrics que les engendren.



## Preface

This dissertation aims at acquiring a “Doctorat en Humanitats” from the Institut Universitari de Cultura at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, as part of the doctoral program of the “Doctorat en Humanitats” which I began in 2003. Following two years of graduate courses and one entire year spent writing a Masters thesis, I finally began working on this broader project in 2006. This was possible because I was a recipient of the FI scholarship for the period 2003-2007, financed by the Generalitat de Catalunya.

My Masters Thesis, entitled “Veü narrativa i ambigüitat moral: el narrador no fiable Shreve a William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*”—which I defended on February 2006—helped me to approach the field and to detect the problems I encountered in the reading of racial relations in literature, and in its general disassociation from narrative devices. The same seemed to occur in regards to the studies of narrative voice in literature. Faulkner’s work encouraged me to think about the relationship between narrative voice and racial stereotypes that is at the core of his literature, and which many modern novels seemed to elaborate.

A few critical remarks on the similarities between William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* and Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* by well-known critics finally convinced me that a more thorough comparison was necessary. I wanted the juxtaposition to go well beyond the mere analyses of the works to locate the source of the ambivalence through which racial issues were represented, and to shed light on the narrative procedures that embedded this effect in the fictions. Through this, a new perspective on the analysis of the representation of “race” in literature emerged, which explored the functions of racial stereotypes in the narratives. By indagating not only the cultural and historical sources of the stereotypes in fiction, but primarily how they introduced into the fiction several codes that were to be used to tell the stories, my perspective has uncovered the possibility of expanding the readings of “race” in literature.

If the use of racial stereotypes in the service of the narratives is by itself sufficiently revelatory of the problematic simplification that stereotypes entail, the preoccupation with the reliability of narrative voice fostered their questioning. In the process I had to face such

complex uses of narrative voice that a reconsideration of the whole debate on reliability in narrative was required. My interests, therefore, originated from a concern with the correspondences between the historical and the formal that attempted to reconcile what in many critical studies appeared as disparate perspectives.

My two advisers, Dr. Miquel Berga Bagué, at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, a specialist in Modern English Literature, and Ricardo Piglia from Princeton University, a writer and a specialist in forms of narration, were crucial figures in the development of this project. The pressing need for an updated bibliography led me to spend several research periods in the United States. They afforded me the concentration and the appropriate resources that the writing of the manuscript demanded. These research periods at New York University (2004), Princeton University (2007), and The University of Chicago (2009)—the first two financed by the fellowship for the mobility of professors based in Catalunya (BE) awarded by the Generalitat de Catalunya—have paced and guided the elaboration of this dissertation in a way that it shares many of the features of the theses and academic work in general pursued in the United States, and has simultaneously benefited from the length and detail allowances of the dissertations presented in Spain and Catalunya. This combination is the result of my own decisions taken with a view to making my argument as precise, as informed, and as current as possible.

These are, in short, the reasons and the circumstances that have justified this project from the beginning.





# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	v
Abstract.....	ix
Preface.....	xi
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
<i>PART I: JOSEPH CONRAD, LORD JIM</i>	
2. GAINING CONVICTION IN <i>LORD JIM</i> : MARLOW, A QUESTIONED STORYTELLER.....	37
2. 1. The secret, multiplicity of narrative voices, and narrative authority.....	45
2. 2. The frame narrator: an approach to its functions.....	52
2. 3. Marlow's narration: a questioned storyteller.....	58
a) The problem of knowledge and its narrative transmission.....	63
b) Voices of persuasion: Marlow and Jim, the story of a friendship.....	72
c) Signs of narrative persuasion.....	96
	27
3. NARRATING STEREOTYPES: THE FICTION OF THE EXOTIC AND THE RACIAL MIRROR IN <i>LORD JIM</i> .....	113
3. 1. The Fiction of the Exotic.....	115
3. 2. Jim as an English gentleman at the heart of the enigma.....	128
3. 3. Racial concerns of a community of listeners: orality and racial representation.....	152
3. 4. Pilgrims as victims and spectators of the <i>Patna</i> incident.....	157
3. 5. Malays: a general view of the stereotype of the Other as a racial mirror.....	165
3. 6. The half-castes' threat, passage, tragedy.....	183

3. 7. <i>Lord Jim</i> : inquiries and assumptions in dealing with the Adventure Novel and Travel Writing.....	196
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*PART II: WILLIAM FAULKNER, ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

4. "LET ME PLAY A WHILE NOW," OR THE ARTIFICE OF NARRATIVE RELIABILITY.....	215
4. 1. Knowledge and language in <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> .....	218
a) Creating Narrative Tension: Narrative enigma, narrative authority, and polyphony.....	218
b) The problem of knowing and the challenges of language.....	224
4. 2. The narrators: characterizing the discussion.....	235
a) The frame narrator.....	237
b) Rosa Coldfield.....	239
c) Mr Compson.....	244
d) Quentin Compson.....	254
e) Shreve McCannon.....	261
4. 3. Narrative voice in the complex structure of <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> .....	273
5. NARRATING THE MYTH OF A RACIAL SOUTH: MISCEGENATION AND THE 'NEGRO' IN <i>ABSALOM, ABSALOM!</i> .....	281
5. 1. The Myth of the South as a framework to the novel.....	282
5. 2. The representation of the 'peculiar institution': functions of slavery in the novel.....	302
5. 3. Neither white nor black: some historical and narrative features of the mulatto character and miscegenation.....	312
a) Charles Bon.....	314
b) Clytie.....	337
c) Other mulatto characters.....	346
5. 4. The House Divided versus the House United, or miscegenation as a prophetic sin.....	352

5. 5. Images of whiteness: a focus on the Anglo-Saxon gentleman and the poor whites.....	366
5. 6. The shadows of the Haitian Revolution.....	376
6. CONCLUSIONS: Between experience and stereotype: ambivalent voices bespeak a heart in conflict.....	391
Works Cited.....	433



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Once, when asked “What books might a young writer read with profit?” William Faulkner is said to have replied: “Well. . . there are Shakespeare’s sonnets and *Henry the Fifth*—some Dickens, and Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and *Nostramo* . . . .”<sup>1</sup> These words may be taken not only as an acknowledgment of mastery—reiterated in other moments—but a revelation about ways of seeing, of living, and of writing. It is in tradition where writers “steal,” as Faulkner liked to say. Yet guiding this conscious or unconscious “stealing” is the choice emerging from the impact the ways of telling have on the writer. This testing of the possibilities and limitations of language as a means of telling stories, is the “play of language,” after which John Matthews entitled his study on Faulkner’s technique. And yet, with him, I believe that feeling the enchantment of language and the pleasure in the manipulation of words should not distract us from recognizing why some techniques are preferred or seem appealing to some writers and not others, in some contexts and not others. This study shares the aim of apprehending the always original and singular conformation of narrative technique with historical circumstances—or what Iouri Tynianov referred to as “la vie sociale” in the novel. By focusing my analysis on two novels, Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (1900) and William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), I will explore how narrative voice conforms with racial context. My object is to focus on the specificity of the latter with aim of reflecting, by extension, upon the broader nature of the former.

In this dissertation, thus, I attempt to explain how Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* innovate in narrative voice in ways that produce an alternative presentation of racial issues and racial relations in fiction. Their achievement lies in the creation of ambivalence through the interplay of these aspects. This ambivalence reflects the social tension and violence of their historical periods. At the same time both writers transform literary

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Dan Brennan, 1940. *Lion in the Garden: interviews with William Faulkner: 1926-1962*. 1968. Ed. James B. Meriwether. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1980, 49.

representation of race by means of their careful deployment of “racial stereotypes” as narrative forms.

If the analysis presented here appears overly minute at first glance, it nonetheless refers to this broader understanding of both literature and the study of literature. My aim is to amplify our comprehension of the artistic principles that shape narrative fiction, and of the means by which literature uses and aesthetically transforms the social context in which it is produced. In this sense, my observations do not only interpret literature, but also frequently entail methodological reflections about the study of literature. These methodological insights define my understanding of literary criticism. I believe that literary criticism should focus on the analysis of the text itself because literature is, above all, art: an aesthetic arrangement of words that produces an emotion and which is guided by several literary principles that, treated in various ways, result in a piece of literature. In this sense, I consider form as the fundamental essence of literature, and therefore a close reading of the text as primordial to literary interpretation. It is mainly because of the aesthetic achievement that some literary works have endured the ravages of time, transformed literature, and inspired other writers. It is artistic achievement that makes Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner masters of literature. On the other hand, to note not only the longevity but also the effects their literary works had on their contemporaries is to acknowledge that History matters for literary works. This is the “worldliness” of literature. I profoundly share Edward Said’s perspective when commenting the theory of the Zaharites on the interpretation of the Koran:

But what ought to strike us forcibly about the whole theory is that it represents a considerably articulated thesis for dealing with a text as significant form, in which—and I put this as carefully as I can—worldliness, circumstantially, the text’s status as an event having sensuous particularly as well as historical contingency, are considered as being incorporated in the text, an infrangible part of its capacity for conveying and producing meaning. This means that a text has a specific situation, placing restraints upon the interpreter and his interpretation not because the situation is hidden within the text as a mystery, but rather because the situation exists at the same level of surface particularly as the textual object itself.

The texts are anchored in their times and their authors' contemporary and personal concerns beyond which their artistic achievement prolongs their life. It is therefore categorically implicit in my sense of literature as at once essentially aesthetic and profoundly historical that criticism should aspire to attend to both historical contingencies and formal development equally and, if possible, simultaneously, in order to behold how art is singularly meaningful.

In participating in recent and still largely neglected calls for the necessity of a convergence between the analysis of narrative form and the study of the cultural and social context that reverts and interplays in literature, my reading attempts to offer an example of the amplification of the scope of literary criticism when these two approaches are analysed in relation to each other. Adequacy shall be the criterion for the fulfillment of this task, since the points of intersection between the two aspects significantly multiply the possibilities in the interpretation of narrative (yet without becoming limitless) and demand greater effort by the critic. My choice has been guided not only by the relevance of these two components of narrative and history, but rather the fruitful effects of their combination in each novel. I am aware that the project of comparing narrative voice and racial representation in literature could be expanded to other works by Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Henry James, Stephen Crane, Jean Toomer, Jean Rhys, Alejo Carpentier, Juan Rulfo, Albert Camus, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Toni Morrison, or J. M. Coetzee, among many others, simply because they engage abundantly with these components in ways that will be elaborated upon here. However, the decision to limit the number of cases under study might be compensated for by their eventual insertion within a larger corpus of works that, although I would not ascribe them to any particular tradition, nevertheless express a similar desire to resist the enforced choice between the formal and the historical. Several aspects have led me to believe that these two elements are interesting in themselves, and that the analysis of their interaction illuminates our comprehension of the texts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Good introductions to the kind of perspective I adopt here are J. H. Stape's chapter on *Lord Jim* in *The Cambridge companion to Joseph Conrad*. Ed. J. H. Stape. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1996; and Theresa M. Towner's *The Cambridge Introduction to William Faulkner* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) with regards to *Absalom, Absalom!* Other important authors quoted in this dissertation such as Jeremy Hawthorn, Richard C. Moreland, Richard Godden, Theresa M. Towner, J. Hillis Miller, and John T. Matthews, have adopted this perspective too.

To begin with, I should indicate that I have adopted Gérard Genette's definition of "narrative voice," based on the Vendryès concept: "[voix:] 'Aspect de l'action verbale dans ses rapports avec le sujet. . . ? Bien entendu, le sujet dont il s'agit ici est celui de l'énoncé, alors que pour nous la *voix* désignera un rapport avec le sujet (et plus généralement l'instance) de l'énonciation.'"<sup>3</sup> And later, "Ce sujet n'étant pas ici seulement celui qui accomplit ou subit l'action, mais aussi celui (le même ou un autre) qui la rapporte, et éventuellement tous ceux qui participent, fût-ce passivement, à cette activité narrative" (226). And thus, different from the narrative perspective otherwise called focalization—the point from which the object told is seen or perceived—"narrative voice" is the instance that *utters* the narration, that speaks.

There is nothing new in the claim that narrative voice became a central concern for the writers of the late nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth, a period designated with the rough critical category of "Modernism," if we have to refer to a literary movement. I will later return to this term as well as the expression "Modern novel." For the moment, we could just note that the bulk of fictional works that undertake this narrative device as key in the exploration of narrative technique is impressive. Innumerable and longstanding studies on Modernism and the Modern Novel have firmly established this technical innovation to repeat here claims that are well known in literary criticism. As a whole, the development of narrative voice discloses preoccupations with the subject, modifications of the narrative perspective, experimentation with the distance between story and narrator, or the erosion of beliefs. All this leads to the experimentation in narrative voice and the concern about the credibility of discourses and of language. Remarkable in many novels is the exploration of the problem of reliability, with Conrad and Faulkner as central figures in this preoccupation. Both were deeply concerned about authority in the telling, and related variations: in characters (subjectivism and intentions), in situations, in means (oral or written), as well as in time.

Parallel to this preoccupation is the social anguish that these two authors live, one more acutely than the other. Both owe to racial discourse a great part of the tensions that shook their immediate social context, in its intended fixing of hierarchies of subjection both in the

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<sup>3</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III*. Paris: Seuil, 1972, 76.

colonial and the supposedly democratic regimes. The ways in which Conrad and Faulkner, as “privileged” members of their societies and in some senses participants of contemporary racial assumptions, were brought up (Faulkner) or came of age (Conrad), allow us to see them in a similar light.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, Conrad lived the social turbulence of late Victorian metropolis, which projected into the broader British Empire. These critical moments of the last two decades of the nineteenth century led to the promotion of the discourse of imperialism, which was accompanied by the tremendous impact, not only of scientific ideas and intellectual elaborations of the idea of “race,” but also the popular propaganda of the times, brilliantly studied by John Mackenzie.<sup>5</sup> What has been termed the discourse of imperialism was a response to the necessity of maintaining a sense of legitimacy and even dignity in the British imperialist enterprise, which found itself in a state of confusion about the proper conduct of imperial policies following a series of crises in the latter half of the century. This period of imperial soul-searching opened with the Indian Mutiny (1857), and the Morant Bay crisis in Jamaica (1865), and finally culminated in the wake of the Berlin Conference (1885) and the Boer Wars (1880-1; 1899-1902). Central to this British debate over the ruling of the Empire was a discussion of the role of the colonizer, a figure that had been shaped in the last decades of the century to suit an idea of an English gentleman who was defined as being essentially Anglo-Saxon, and thus, white. Certainly, this racial discourse played a decisive role in the foundation of contemporary imperialist discourse. This explains why the description and justification of the power of the colonizers over the colonized was channeled through and itself

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<sup>4</sup> I share here Hosam Aboul-Ela’s establishment of relations of inspiration between writers, which do not correlate completely to what has been conventionally understood as “influence.” He argues that “Kanafani’s discovery of Faulkner did not reveal new strategies to him, as much as it reinforced the aesthetic choices he had already been making, giving him a new and valuable perspective on what he was doing. At a level deeper than influence, similarities of socioeconomic context, as reflected in aesthetic choices, link the two writers. Indeed, this connection—between material culture and ideology of form—explains a phenomenon rarely commented upon in studies linking Faulkner with Latin American narrative: many Latin American writers’ explicit denial of the Mississippian’s influence” (*Other South: Faulkner, Coloniality, and the Mariátegui Tradition*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2007, 132.)

<sup>5</sup> John Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984. See also, Thomas G. August, *The Selling of the Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890-1940*. Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1985.

produced fixed images of the colonial subjects in sharp contrast to the figure of the colonizer, which through repetition became part of the imagery of the British people in their apprehension of their overseas domains and in the definition of their relationship with these territories and their inhabitants. The contrast between disquieting news and propagandistic enthusiasm for and emanating from the Empire, however, filtered a state of unrest that was already present in a few literary works set in the colonial territories, such as those of Joseph Conrad and the late Robert Louis Stevenson—by contrast to domestic fiction that was more directly concerned with the social tension within Little England. The social tension produced by this contrast made the discourses of imperialism emerge as problematic, without yet encountering propitious circumstances for the articulation of a critique of the legitimacy of the Empire, which was only incipient. Since what we understand today as anti-imperialism had not yet emerged when Conrad published *Lord Jim*, the Polish author's ideological and geographical distance from the imperial project does not exude the brutal violence Faulkner experienced in the U.S. South three decades later.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, William Faulkner also lived in a society shaken by extreme tension and violence resulting from the Jim Crow segregated system (1896-1964), reading in the newspapers and hearing incessantly about lynching, violence against blacks—and whites, though undoubtedly less frequent—and the increasingly vociferous denunciations of a discriminatory system based on racial distinctions.<sup>7</sup> Although, in

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<sup>6</sup> For a good introduction on the discourse of imperialism and its problems, see C. C. Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience: From Carlyle to Forster*. London: MacMillan Press, 1996. See an interesting volume on recent perspectives and bibliography on the British Empire, *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*. Ed. Sarah Stockwell. Oxford: Blackwell publishing, 2008; and the reference work on the British Empire, Wm. Roger Louis, ed.-in-chief, *The Oxford history of the British Empire*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1998-9. Especially v. 3 “The nineteenth century.” Ed. Andrew Porter.

<sup>7</sup> Although lynchings declined in the U.S. from 1930 to 1945, Neil R. McMillen describes their presence in *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1989) and the attitudes to them in Mississippi during the Jim Crow era. It is notable that 1935, only one year before *Absalom, Absalom!* was published, was “a year in which Mississippi accounted for two-thirds of all lynchings reported in the United States” (241). As for Oxford, Mississippi, lynchings are reported during Faulkner's life in 1908 (see Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*. One-Volume Edition. New York: Random House, 1984, 32) and 1935 (see “The Lynching Calendar: African Americans who died in racial violence in the

contrast to Conrad's context, the discourse of "race" in the 1930's relied less virulently on "scientific" ideas to delineate the difference, substituting them for an idea of "race" which rested on the belief that races were culturally different without being necessarily inferior or superior to one another;<sup>8</sup> nonetheless, the violence was constant and tremendously present and the cultural basis for the distinction of "races" only complementary criteria to reinforce the difference when supposedly biological aspects (phenotypic or mainly based on ancestry) were not apparent. The new concept of "race" did not prevent—and probably just reinforced—either the continuity of codified racial ideas or the persistence of a still more contradictory inequality under the stipulations of the "separate but equal" society of the Jim Crow system. Indeed, the transformation of the idea of "race" as a blend of ancestry and of cultural heritage and manners during the 1920's and 1930's, as Walter Benn Michaels argues, perhaps explains the endurance of the stereotypes that had been present in literature and in racial discourse in general. In fact, these stereotypes had long attributed both "biological" difference (notoriously, phenotypic) and distinct "cultural" behaviors to each "race," producing categories that, although during those decades ostensibly signifying only "difference" rather than superiority or inferiority, in practice could be perceived not only as less definite and defined but, furthermore, as the sole operative basis in the creation of social and economic discrimination. The very question "Who is black?"—to borrow the title of F. James Davis' book—found not only challenging and ambiguous responses in novels

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United States during 1865-1965" <http://www.autopsis.org/foot/lynchplaces2.html>. Consulted November 12, 2009). See some of Faulkner's comments over the years on lynching in Letter to Editor of *Commercial Appeal*, February 15, 1931 (*Essays* 339); Letter to Malcolm A. Franklin, Sunday [4 July 1943] (*Selected Letters of William Faulkner* 175); Letter to the Editor of the *Commercial Appeal*, March 26, 1950 (*Essays* 203), "Letter to a Northern Editor" (*Essays* 90); "On Fear: Deep South in Labor: Mississippi" (*Essays* 100); Press dispatch written in Rome, Italy for the United Press, on the Emmett Till Case, published in the *New York Herald Tribune*, September 9, 1955 (*Essays* 222-3). For a historical explanation of the Jim Crow period, see especially Edward L. Ayers's *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992; and Jerrold M. Packard, *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002; and Nikki L. M. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford, eds., *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia*. Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> An excellent study that traces the changes underpinning the idea of 'race' from a strictly biological definition based on a scale from inferiority to superiority, to a more complex concept that embraced a 'cultural' understanding of races and emphasized 'difference' instead, is Walter Benn Michaels' *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995.

such as George S. Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931) and interestingly complex ones in the novels of "passing" such as Nella Larsen's, but it also provoked immense difficulties in the very process of writing the States' laws, whose confusing and arbitrary way of defining "blackness" threatened to be undermined by those cases in which racial lines were blurred.<sup>9</sup> It is precisely because the Jim Crow system depended on the preservation of racial lines that anti-miscegenation had to become the foundation of the segregated society and constituted such a challenging yet enthralling theme in William Faulkner's discussion of the contemporary debates on racial discrimination. One is impressed by the extent to which miscegenation was still a potent and troublesome issue during the 1930s, when Faulkner published at least two novels centered on the topic, in what might appear as a "criminal" act according to the fact that "[i]n 1930, the state of Mississippi . . . enacted a criminal statute that made punishable the 'publishing, printing, or circulating of any literature in favor of or urging interracial marriage or social equality. (Simply representing interracial marriage, or criticizing its criminalization, was often perceived to be the same as 'favoring' or 'urging' it.)"<sup>10</sup> As in the case of the late Victorian period, the fixed images and arguments of racial discourse strongly contradicted the dynamics of social relations, resulting in unspeakable violence and controversial viewpoints in Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner's works.

Their respective historical contexts were completely different, and I hope that the detail with which I have treated the representation of "race" in each novel fairly accounts for this. The ideas related to "race," their consequences and functions in the societies in which the novels were produced as well as the stories represented, are also quite different. What is maintained in a number of cases are the images that the racial discourses at the height of their influence have coined, which have been repeated and recycled through various means (in popular culture but also "scientific," political discourses, or economic arguments, for example) and which can be traced over time in surprisingly similar forms. Furthermore, the circulation of images of the colonized and the enslaved was impressive, as Patrick Brantlinger

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<sup>9</sup> F. James Davis, *Who is Black? One Nation's Definition*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993; Pauli Murray, *State's Laws on Race and Color*. 1951. Atlanta: U of Georgia P, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Werner Sollors, *Neither black nor white yet both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997, 4.

and Douglass Lorimer show, and helped shape similar reproductions to be applied in disparate contexts.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the representation of the Malays is, in fact, not far away from the representation of the “Negro” in Africa or in the United States.

This last observation supports the already established idea of the Other in criticism, launched by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and thereafter rapidly embraced by the so called “postcolonial criticism.”<sup>12</sup> As defined by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin’s *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* in the entry Other/other:

In general terms, the ‘other’ is anyone who is separate from one’s self. The existence of others is crucial in defining what is ‘normal’ and in locating one’s own place in the world. The colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ through discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view. . . . The Other—with a capital ‘O’—has been called the *grande-autre* by Lacan, the great Other, in whose gaze the subject gains identity. . . . This Other can be compared to the imperial centre, imperial discourse, or the empire itself in two ways: firstly, it provides the terms in which the colonized subject gains a sense of his or her identity as somehow ‘other,’ dependent; secondly, it becomes the ‘absolute pole of address,’ the ideological framework in which the colonized subject may come to understand the world.<sup>13</sup>

My position is based on the assumption that contained in these racial stereotypes are the tensions and violence that enforce the distinction of one group from another, and I believe that the very term “Other” indicates that the interchangeability of some current features of these

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<sup>11</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1988; Douglass A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*. Leicester: Leicester UP; New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978.

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of postcolonial studies in literature, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995. Also of interest for the perspective and themes of this study, Bill Ashcroft and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in post-colonial literatures*. 1989. London and New York: Routledge, 2002; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995; Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: hybridity in theory, culture, and race*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000, 169.

stereotypes only points to the very fact that what is predominantly relevant here is how the shaping of this “other” is mainly a shaping of “us” (as Marlow will say). It is precisely this perspective that I adopt.

I see in the stereotype mainly the creation of difference that has historically supported the placement of certain groups of people under conditions of inferiority on every plane of life. Assuming the perspective increasingly adopted by critics when considering the representation of “race” in literature to understand in the expression of the Other the expression of the self, I consider “whiteness” in the terms Toni Morrison, in her *Playing in the Dark*, urges critics to see in literature written by “white” authors: “What Africanism became for, and how it functioned in the literary imagination is of paramount interest because it may be possible to discover, through a close look at literary ‘blackness,’ the nature—even the cause—of literary ‘whiteness.’”<sup>14</sup> This point of view shall provide a guiding light in our interpretation of literature itself, as well as the analysis of the implications of that belief in society.

My perspective therefore engages the efforts in that direction brilliantly pioneered by Theresa Towner in relation to William Faulkner’s later novels, and implicit among others in Eric Sundquist, Philip Weinstein, Thadious Davis, and Barbara Ladd’s previous analysis of his work.<sup>15</sup> Towner argues that “as I believe my discussion of *Sanctuary* in this chapter will indicate, Faulkner did not need specific racial issues in order to racialize his subject matter; in fact, Toni

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<sup>14</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992, 9. For “American Africanism” Morrison understands “the ways in which a nonwhite, Africanlike (or Africanist) presence or persona was constructed in the United States, and he imaginative uses this fabricated presence served. . . I use it as a term for the connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people” (6).

<sup>15</sup> Theresa M. Towner, *Faulkner on the Color Line: The Later Novels*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000; Eric Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983; Philip M. Weinstein, *Faulkner’s Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992; and *What Else But Love? The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and Morrison*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996; Thadious M. Davis, *Faulkner’s Negro: Art and the Southern Context*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983; Barbara Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1996. See also *Faulkner and Whiteness*. Ed. Jay Watson. Spec. issue of *The Faulkner Journal* 22.1/2 (Fall 2006).

Morrison would argue that his racialization of the white subject's imagination is even more telling than his representations of black characters might be" (11). Much less work in that sense has been undertaken by Joseph Conrad's criticism which, although it assumed much earlier the ambivalence in his writing with regards to "imperialism" and ideas of "race," still bases its description on the construction of the "other" rather than in the construction of "whiteness," or at least in the interplay of both, as we will see. In the adoption of this perspective, thus, lies the justification of my treatment of "white" stereotypes such as the largely unacknowledged "English gentleman" in *Lord Jim* as well as the stereotypes of the "Anglo-Saxon gentleman" and the "poor whites" in *Absalom, Absalom!* There is a remarkable difference with respect to this in my treatment of the two novels: my analysis of *Lord Jim* focuses more directly on the "construction of whiteness," since this is the particular preoccupation at this moment in the late nineteenth-century British Empire, whereas the analysis of racial representation in *Absalom, Absalom!* is more concerned with the construction of "blackness"—and thus of "whiteness" by opposition—since there is an emphasis on the confusing establishment of the color line, which was the crucial problematic of the time. However, both perspectives show the interdependency of the stereotypes with their generally silent counterparts, as we will see later in detail.

Returning to the idea of the "Other," my perspective as outlined above has paradoxically prevented me from using the term unless absolutely unavoidable. To clarify, this tendency proceeds from my insistence on the different contexts and the very naming of the actual stereotypes. Indeed, when referring to particular stereotypes of "the Negro," such as the "passing figure," the "slave," the "half-caste," or the "Malay," the stereotypes function in a particular context and interpose themselves into—or perhaps even shape—contemporary debates. To refer to those constructions simply as stereotypes of the "Other" would have meant using the codified ideas abstractly—which literature also does however—and would have occluded how these ideas were operative historically, as well as the reasons for their endurance.

I use the terms "race" and "Negro" in the same vein. I intend to preserve the historical uses of these terms, so as not to fall into anachronisms. When I omit to enclose them in quotation marks, this

is merely to avoid overloading the text with visual marks. However my detachment from the claims made by contemporaries about “race” and the “Negro” is, needless is to say, absolute. Some further precisions on the idea of “race” shall establish my understanding of this complex category, which is still a matter of heated debate. However much it may appear that society has abandoned the idea of a biological basis for “race,” recent and very dangerous developments in the medical field point at a revitalization of some of these ideas, for which purpose I would like to invoke Adolph Reed Jr.’s insistent argument that “race is a category that has no substantial roots in biology” (12). However, as he points out, this should not prevent us from acknowledging that “race is a *social* reality” (13).<sup>16</sup> Thus, “race,” as understood by “scientists” in the sense of a qualitative differentiation between groups of people based on biological criteria, does not have any credibility, nor do I consider it as a valid or definitive cultural delimitation of any group of people. Ontologically, I also understand “race” as a “social construction” (Reed 33). However, the discarding of “race” as a real ontological entity should not distract us from perceiving its reality, as Reed also points out. I think we should understand that “race” exists as a “belief.” This unessential existence is nonetheless crucial, since it is precisely its operativeness in historical contexts that explains its endurance. By this I mean that we need to understand the extent to which the belief exists in order to understand how “race” “has described and *inscribed* differences of language, belief system, artistic tradition, and gene pool, as well as all sorts of supposedly natural attributes such as rhythm, athletic ability, cerebration, usury, fidelity, and so forth,”<sup>17</sup> which in turn have exerted their power in “naturalizing images of existing hierarchies, which validate the values, prejudices, and socioeconomic position of the relatively privileged by making them appear precisely not as the product of contested and contestable social relations” (Reed 33). It is in that sense that we need to understand “race” as a “reality,” since, as the debates voiced in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* show, it had—and still has—factual prejudicial consequences for real people who were imposed or felt compelled to believe in a “racial identity,” which,

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<sup>16</sup> Adolph Reed, Jr., “Making Sense of Race, I: The Ideology of Race, the Biology of Human Variation, and the Problem of Medical and Public Health Research.” *TJP* 1 (2005): 13.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Editor’s Introduction: Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference it Makes.” *Race, Writing, and Difference*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986, 5.

like other identities such as the national, gendered, or religious, historically enforced the establishment of inequality.<sup>18</sup>

The study of “race” in history as well as in literature thus relies in great part on “beliefs about race.” This has brought me to consider for my literary analysis the idea of the stereotype as the manifestation of those beliefs. A stereotype is therefore an idea that appears fixed, is repeated, and the content of which, as a result of the insistency with which it is repeated, becomes ingrained in the language and the culture to such an extent that it falsely occupies the space of knowledge (and is thus endowed with authority), and can be mobilised by simple indication once it is widely shared and operative in society. In some sense, we could even understand it as one of M. M. Bakhtin’s speech genres.<sup>19</sup> Although I will later describe how I fully assume Homi Bhabha’s concept of the stereotype as a structure, I shall advance here that the stereotype not only contains a contradiction, but that it acts as an indicator of an imposed identity that reveals social tensions, violence, and hierarchies. In the contrast between the complexities of historical circumstances and living individuals, and those fixed discursive images, which are the root of both Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner’s concerns, social tensions are revealed. And it is precisely here that my approach participates of the critical endeavor suggested by Kenneth Warren when he indicates that “while it remains

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<sup>18</sup> I am deeply indebted for this understanding of the concept to Professor Kenneth W. Warren. The conversations I maintained with him and his very generous guiding in my readings and ideas have allowed me to formulate this perspective.

<sup>19</sup> In “The Problem of Speech Genres” Bakhtin underlines the *utterance*, rather than language itself, as the essence in the communicative act. In his relation of the social speech forms, or speech genres, that are used by the speakers in response or dialogue with previous utterances that involve particular uses of language, we might find an explication of the linguistic yet codified nature of the stereotype. As he suggests “Moreover, any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances—his own and others’—with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds on them, polemicalizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener;” and later: “When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee’s perception of my speech: the extent to which he is familiar with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the given cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies—because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance” (*Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986, 69 and 95).

important, intellectually and politically, to address the multiple factors that have set African Americans apart from their fellow citizens, it is equally worthwhile to attend to the pressures that challenge cultural distinctiveness. The point is not to construct a racially integrated literary utopia but to highlight the intellectual and cultural anxieties that have made separatism and discrimination in a variety of forms seem viable solutions to the social problems of a supposedly democratic society.”<sup>20</sup> Whereas this perspective clearly suits Faulkner’s work, this study certainly tries to apprehend how social anxieties were also inscribed and transformed in the literature of Joseph Conrad, for in spite of his staggering distance from the discourse of the colonizer in a less unabashedly democratic society, the latter also displays blatant and uncomfortable contradictions in the underpinnings of the system of beliefs which shaped the practices of discrimination throughout the territories of the Empire. The stereotype thus provides me with the connection, at the level of ideas shaped *in discourse*, with the historical context in which the novels were produced.

Beyond this, the stereotype offers the crucial relation with the formal realm, since stereotypes are forms of economy in the narrative, as Morrison notes (67). The stereotype is thus both a narrative and a social device. This perspective enables me to think of the stereotype not only as a mere container for a social idea in a narrative, utilized arbitrarily or to add colour, that allows the writer to introduce aspects that are ultimately unimportant, but rather as a means to directing the attention of the narrative towards the racial factor. The stereotype in these novels functions to underscore rather than to disparage the assumptions it comprises. The full implications of this statement will be clear by the end of the project.

What is important to remark here is that my approach brings to the narrative the idea of the stereotype as a codified belief that is operative in society and from which the fiction benefits formally and thematically in the construction of the story it tells. In narrative, therefore, my idea of the racial stereotype is that it needs to be understood as a “narrative form,” as a way of narrating, of telling, which does not disregard the belief it encodes but that, conversely, pays attention to the way this fixed belief introduces into the narrative the play of the social context and historical debates it contains. To

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<sup>20</sup> Kenneth W. Warren, *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1993, 10.

further clarify the stated approach to racial representation in literature through the concept of the “stereotype,” I shall introduce Bhabha’s theoretical notion since it is through its relevant features that my analysis of the novels is conducted.

In his seminal essay on the structure and working of racial stereotypes “The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism,” Bhabha elaborates a widely admired definition of the “stereotype” based on its structural ambivalence, which is considered to be “one of the most significant discursive and physical strategies of discriminatory power—whether racist or sexist, peripheral or metropolitan.”<sup>21</sup> This notion of ambivalence is central to the stereotype for “it gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in *excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically constructed” (95). Bhabha’s understanding of stereotypes is concerned with its working in context as well as with its structure, much more than with its particular fixed yet multifaceted ‘content.’ In Bhabha’s view, the stereotype is shaped by a contradictory structure that combines the phobia and the fetish and that maintains its complexity and flexibility in disparate contexts, ensuring its permanence. Not only is the description of its functioning brilliantly elucidated through the idea of the fetish borrowed from Freud, but its intimate relation to the rhetorical tropes of metaphor and metonymy unfolds its essential linguistic constitution. It is precisely here that Bhabha reveals the kinship between the discursive and psychological/cultural dimensions of the stereotype as a form. Bhabha explains how stereotypes operate in a complex yet clear way, taking the sexual difference also projected in stereotypes as a starting point for his argument:

The recognition of sexual difference—as the precondition for the circulation of the chain of absence and presence in the realm of the Symbolic—is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks that difference and restores an original presence. The *functional* link between the fixation of the fetish and the stereotype (or the stereotype as fetish) is even more relevant. For fetishism is always a “play” or

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<sup>21</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006, 95.

vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity—in Freud’s terms: “All men have penises”; in ours: “All men have the same skin/race/culture” —and the anxiety associated with lack and difference—again, for Freud “Some do not have penises”; for us “Some do not have the same skin/race/culture.” Within discourse, the fetish represents the simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution (masking absence and difference) and metonymy (which contiguously registers the perceived lack). The fetish or stereotype gives access to an “identity” which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it. (107)

Stereotypes, therefore, are defined as interrelations of presence /absence through processes of substitution or partial designation. From this point of view, when we consider a particular fixed stereotype we need to attend to the absent part of it, whether the section not represented or the substituted object. The simplification of each of the multifarious yet contradictory codified stereotypes, however, “constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations” because it denies “the play of difference (which the negation of the Other permits)” (107). Thus, to be able to behold this play of difference we need to attend to the multiple forms stereotypes adopt as well as to the absent or substituted objects that provide us with the referent of their metaphorical or metonymic working. As we are going to see both in *Lord Jim* and in *Absalom, Absalom!*, silence and negative strategies provide the foundations for the racial representations in these two novels, for they manage to restore a shadowing absence. In their fixing function, the codified forms of the stereotype impede “the circulation and articulation of the signifier of ‘race’ as anything other than its *fixity* as racism” (108). This is why Bhabha urges critics to avoid limiting themselves to the “normalized” official fixity of stereotypes and to attend to the process of subjectification. Bhabha points to a further dichotomy related to both fetishism and to colonial discourse when introducing the pattern of narcissism/aggressivity borrowed from Lacan’s Imaginary in the subject’s formative mirror phase:

This positioning is itself problematic, for the subject finds and recognizes itself through an image which is simultaneously alienating and hence potentially confrontational. This is the basis of the close relation between two forms of identification complicit with the Imaginary—narcissism and aggressivity. It is precisely these two forms

of identification that constitute the dominant strategy of colonial power exercised in relation to the stereotype which, as a form of multiple and contradictory belief, gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or masks it. Like the mirror phase ‘the fullness’ of the stereotype—its image as identity—is always threatened by ‘lack.’ (110)

As a consequence of this, the author synthesizes stereotypical racial discourse as a “four-term strategy,” associating the metaphorical fetish to the narcissistic object-choice and the metonymic lack to the aggressiveness of racial stereotypes.

Bhabha’s concept of the stereotype, though highly theoretical, can help us understand the symbiosis of presence/absence, its linguistic basis, its multiplicity and therefore “flexibility” of forms, and the circularity of desire/ideals and fears/lacks that are aggressively fixed and made official in racial stereotypes. It immediately brings into focus the inner contradiction hidden within “normalized” and codified stereotypes, which requires a contrast to what is absent, whether it is the voice that enunciates the stereotype, or the individual upon whom a racial stereotype is imposed. Such an antithetic relation to reality in its concreteness suggests a disruption between individual and collective identities, or between reality and racial discourse that are masterfully developed in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* The process of confronting a codified discourse of racial stereotypes with the experience of subjects is thus condensed in the contradictory form of the stereotype as defined by Bhabha, which contains the extraordinary tension and violence of its aggressive imposition mentioned above. It is precisely this huge distance between the fixity of stereotypes and the circulation of historical experience and existence that is uncovered in the conflicting, ambivalent representation of race in Conrad’s and Faulkner’s fictional worlds.

When we examine stereotypes as the chief device for racial representation in literature, our adoption of Bhabha’s prime exposition faces the problem of disregarding the artistic dimension of the stereotype: that is, its use as a narrative source in literature. If the stereotype is a narrative device used to move forward in the narration taking advantage of the reader’s previous knowledge, a further step is nonetheless required for the study of racial representation in literature that would make both its aesthetic and social dimensions converge. This is the point where it becomes necessary to think about racial

stereotypes as narrative forms. The two aforementioned perspectives of the stereotype—one that considers its general working and is drawn mainly from a psychological insight in historical context, and the other which takes a formal literary point of view—should be merged to constitute a narrative strategy that, informed by its working in its cultural and social context, is employed in its narrative possibilities to perform what Tynianov terms ‘une fonction constructive.’ Tynianov draws our attention to the multiple functions of a work of art, which may not only articulate the relation to the ‘séries voisines’ (all the serial aspects that are connected to the work, such as ‘la vie sociale,’ or their literary traditions) but also—and I would even say, primarily—perform what he calls a ‘fonction constructive.’ As he explains, “’appelle *fonction* constructive d’un élément de l’oeuvre littéraire comme système, sa possibilité d’entrer en corrélation avec les autres éléments du même système et par conséquent avec le système entier.”<sup>22</sup> In such a view, the many ingredients that may be distinguished in a literary work need to be considered in their multiple functions, both in their relation to external series and their internal ones.

From this angle, when I claim that racial stereotypes are narrative forms I mean that we need to understand how the historically informed stereotypes—activated in the narrative because they are shared by a community of contemporaries—have an aesthetic use in a narrative text. As I hope to demonstrate, the narrative use of racial stereotypes takes advantage of the particular information they convey, the connotation of words, expressions and statements, and their contradictory use when they are involved in real context, in order to introduce current historical debates and intervene in the representation of “racial issues.” Racial discourse is so highly codified in historical contexts that readers are called upon to fill the silences or absences in the novels’ deployment of stereotypes as well as frequently being asked to participate in their interpretation, thus contributing to the elaboration of complex ways of presenting “race” in literature. Racial stereotypes will be understood as Bhabha articulates them within the historical context they operate, but the analysis shall focus on their narrative utilization in the novel and their function as the source of an alternative way of expressing racial issues in literature.

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<sup>22</sup> Iouri Tynianov “De l’évolution littéraire.” *Théorie de la littérature: Textes des Formalistes russes*. 1965. Ed. and trans. Tzvetan Todorov. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001, 125.

The preoccupation with beliefs contained in the form of the racial stereotype is also present in the elaboration of narrative voice in many of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner's novels. Observed as part of the network of the narratives, the racial stereotypes in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are entangled in a complex web of narrative principles such as time, plot, and narrative voice. While all these aspects are important, and will indeed form a part of my argument, the intertwining of racial stereotypes with what Francis Mulhern calls an "hyperphasic" narrative voice can be explained through the articulation of a similar problem in the terrain of historical discourses.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Conrad and Faulkner articulate the anxieties of the dubious credibility of the discourse of race in their societies—which are part of larger historical accounts and ideologies such as the British imperialist discourse of the last decades of the nineteenth-century, and the discourse of the Southern myth—at the same time that they explore the credibility of the discourses as language and as uttered by narrators in the fiction. The questioning of the beliefs is thus enacted both in their use of the racial stereotypes as narrative forms, as well as in their investigation of the problem of reliability in narrative voice. Both aspects produce ambivalence and combine to render the effects of the uncertain position of each novel in relation to the racial discourse as well as the narrative voice. Consequently, it is only in conjunction with each other that the complex of the mutual effects and interdependency of these aspects can be perceived.

The author's concern with the problem of narrative reliability demands a few theoretical clarifications that situate my analysis in relation to several debates central to narrative theory. Indeed, this dissertation aims at producing a few critical insights regarding the discussions and definitions of "unreliable" and "reliable" narration, which guide the analysis of the narrative voice. Both *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* center their exploration of narrative voice on the problem of narrative reliability, drawing upon a variety of sources that create very modulated narrative voices which, however, are somewhat incongruous with the descriptions offered by the theory of narrative for the discussion of reliability in fiction.

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<sup>23</sup> Francis Mulhern, "Conrad's Inconceivable History." *New Left Review* 38 (March-April 2006): 59-93.

In order to address these difficulties I have slightly changed the point of view in the course of the discussion, moving beyond the dichotomy between “unreliable” and “reliable narration” to think of these as just different formulations of the problem of narrative reliability in general. As it will become clear as my argument unfolds, Conrad and Faulkner pursue their concerns over reliability or credibility through the elaboration of nuanced narrative voices that vary in their narrative distance and their narrative authority to such a degree that their presentation of the problem is much more complex than the rigid distinction between “reliable/unreliable narration” would allow. Thus, a more flexible understanding of the process of persuasion in the narratives shall give us more liberty to consider how narrative voices deal with that problem, and provide a point of entrance to the complex elaboration of degrees of reliability. In order to establish the terminology I will be utilizing to highlight the problems and the eventual reformulation of some of the terms of the theoretical debate, an overview of the current state of the discussion and a description of the concepts “unreliable narration,” “fallible narration,” and “discordant narration” shall be helpful as a basis for setting out my perspective.

To begin with, my contention is that the study of narrative reliability has overly emphasized a polarization between “reliability” and “unreliability” that understates the “problem of narrative reliability” itself, which is the concern that writers face. The problem was diagnosed without being explored in detail as far back as Tamar Yacobi’s article “Fictional Reliability as a Communicative Problem,” where she described this narrative feature:

There can be little doubt about the importance of the problem of reliability in narrative and in literature as a whole. It arises with respect to every speaking and reflecting participant in the literary act of communication, from the interlocutors in dialogue scenes to the overall narrator to the author himself; and its resolution determines not our view of the speaker alone but also of the reality evoked and the norms implied in and through his message.<sup>24</sup>

Any text thus raises the question of the relationship between its internal elements, and that of the text with the external referential

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<sup>24</sup> Tamar Yacobi, “Fictional Reliability as a Communicative Problem.” *Poetics Today* 2.2 (Winter 1981): 113.

reality, which is variable and which might present inconsistencies that the reader—Yacobi understands the problem of reliability as a problem of communication, as I do—needs to resolve when confronting the text.<sup>25</sup> Though she distinguishes five levels which affect the reliability of a fictional text (internal and external) and which shall certainly enter into my analysis, Yacobi pays greater attention to what she names “the *perspectival principle*, which brings divergent as well as otherwise unrelated elements into pattern by attributing them, in whole or in part, to the peculiarities and circumstances of the observer through whom the world is taken to be refracted” (118). Accordingly, the problem of reliability for the most part translates into the fiction as a problem of the narrative voice.<sup>26</sup> Critics have expectedly been attracted to the most extreme form of presenting inconsistencies in the narrative voice, that is, unreliability, because of the complexity and the sophistication of this narrative technique. This explains why the debate has revolved, albeit uncomfortably at times, around the opposition between reliability and unreliability.

Although substantially modified, Wayne Booth’s basic yet cautious description of this opposition remains true, when he stated that “I have called a narrator *reliable* when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms), *unreliable* when he does not.”<sup>27</sup> I fully agree with the definition he provides of an “unreliable narrator,” but I object to the fact that this opposition undercuts many achievements in narrative voice which, while not qualifying as “unreliable” voices nonetheless explore the problem of narrative reliability, bringing out still more powerfully the complexities of this narrative principle.

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<sup>25</sup> The development of semiotics in the philosophy of language from Saussure to Jakobson, to J. L. Austin’s, *How to do Things with words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) and John R. Searle’s, *Speech Acts: An Essay on the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge UP, 1969) have found applications in the understanding of narrative as a communicative act, which is fundamental to the theory of reception and models of narrative such as the proposed by Seymour Chatman in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1979. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) and *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> Although the use of the term “perspective” might be confusing at first sight here as distinct from “voice,” it is clear that the effect is created through narrative voice later in her article.

<sup>27</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 1961. London: Penguin Books, 1987, 158.

In discussing “unreliability,” narratologists have so far mainly addressed the following concerns: the personalization of “unreliability,” concentrating on character-narrators and remaining undecided with regards to heterodiegetic non-characterized narrators;<sup>28</sup> the related doubt of whether unreliability is only constructed upon the voice of the character;<sup>29</sup> the relationship between the narrator’s reliability and the issue of knowledge in the fiction;<sup>30</sup> ideological concerns in the fictive reality;<sup>31</sup> the role of the reader in relation to the effectiveness and relative functioning of the device over time.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Most articles encounter this problem since William Riggan published *Pícaros, Madmen, Naijs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-Person Narrator* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1981). Some good attempts have been made to formulate how homodiegetic narrators are constructed as unreliable, for instance Uri Margolin’s “The Doer and the Deed: Action as a Basis for the Characterization in Narrative” (*Poetics Today* 7.2, 1986, 205-225) or, applied to drama Brian Richardson’s “Point of View in Drama: Diegetic Monologue, Unreliable Narrators, and the Author’s Voice on Stage” (*Comparative Drama* 22.3, 1988, 193-214). See also the most recent analysis of heterodiegetic unreliability in Dieter Meindl, “(Un-)Reliable Narration from a Pronominal Perspective.” *The Dynamics of Narrative Form: Studies in Anglo-American Narratology*. Ed. John Pier. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004. 59-82; Gunther Martens, “Revising and Extending the Scope of the Rhetorical Approach to Unreliable Narration.” *Narrative Unreliability in the Twentieth-Century First-Person Novel*. Ed. Elke D’hoker and Gunther Martens. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008. 77-105. Refer to this recent volume to see mainly the reflections on the state of the debate, both in the conceptualization of the technique and its application on several cases.

<sup>29</sup> See for instance Yacobi, “Fictional; James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin, “The Lessons of ‘Weymouth’: Homodiegesis, Unreliability, Ethics, and *The Remains of the Day*.” *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*. Ed. David Herman. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1999. 88-109; “Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of *Lolita*.” *Narrative* 15.2 (May 2007): 222-238.

<sup>30</sup> Monika Fludernik, “Defining (In)Sanity: The Narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* and the Question of Unreliability.” *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext/Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*. Ed. Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1999. 75-95. Greta Olson, “Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators.” *Narrative* 11.1 (January 2003): 93-109.

<sup>31</sup> Dorrit Cohn, “Discordant Narration.” *Style* 32.2 (Summer 2000): 307-316.

<sup>32</sup> Ansgar Nünning, “‘But *will* you say that I am mad?’ On the Theory, History, and Signals of Unreliable Narration in British Fiction.” *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik (AAA)* 22.1 (1997): 83-105; and “Unreliable, compared to what? Towards a Cognitive Theory of *Unreliable Narration*: Prolegomena and Hypotheses.” *Grenzüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext/Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context* 53-73; Bruno Zerweck, “Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction.” *Style* 35.1 (Spring 2001): 151-178; Vera Nünning, “Unreliable Narration and the Historical Variability of

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Shreve McCannon comfortably fits the category of “unreliable narrator” since, as I will argue, the novel as a whole strongly encourages the reader not to trust him and to suspect that Thomas Sutpen’s story could have happened differently than he tells it. In this case, the help of the aforementioned narratologists has proved extremely valuable. However, the fictions present such a complicated elaboration of narrative reliability that the salient voices of Charlie Marlow and Mr Compson strongly resist the rigidly delimited classifications and fall into a profoundly ambivalent category which, in fact, not only challenges the boundaries of unreliability but, more importantly, it serves the purpose of expressing ideological confusion. The problems associated with what at times might appear to be a “reliable” or “unreliable” voice are not only technical, but this imbalance is at once supported by and serves to absorb into the fiction a historical debate over both racial discourses and race relations, as I expect to demonstrate by the end of this study.

What I want to underline here, though, is that while the categories explored in the field of what I reframe as “narrative reliability” are extremely useful when considering clearly unreliable narrators, they fail to perceive the whole range of experiments undertaken by writers in their fictions when they address their concern about narrative reliability. For that reason, I have analysed the proximate voices of Marlow and Mr Compson along the lines of what I have named “the process of narrative persuasion,” which they are both engaged in and which is underscored in the narrative but nevertheless remains remarkably distinct from unreliable narrative voices in their relation to knowledge, their idea of the telling, the idea of “Truth” in the narrative, their rhetorical manners, and their narrative authority.

A preliminary approach to the discussion of “unreliability” in the terms that I assume to be useful here might help in sketching the boundaries of the field in which my discussion takes place, in the chapters on narrative voice in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Indeed, my analysis of narrative voice needs to be seen as partaking of the efforts to define not only a “modern” exploration of voice but, more specifically, the concerns dealing with the principle of credibility in relation to it.

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Values and Norms: The Vicar of Wakefield as a Test Case of a Cultural-historical Narratology.” *Style* 38 (2004): 236-252. Phelan, “Estranging.

In general, we should understand that “unreliable narration” is a mode of narrating that, by means of narrative voice, creates a distance between the account that renders the story and the story itself as it is supposed to have happened in the fictional reality. Too many qualifications might easily be made here, yet the fundamental idea would be that the text invites the reader to articulate that distance and, thus, to think that an alternative way of seeing and telling that story is possible. The erosion of the narrative voice’s credibility is the focus. Seeing that subjects are vulnerable just because they cannot escape a phenomenological perception of reality, the purpose and interest of this technique in fiction should be clear enough. Whereas under that general assertion it might seem at first glance that all narrators are not fully credible, “unreliable narration” is distinguished because it makes credibility the conflict or problem of the narrative itself, thus bringing to the foreground of the fiction the problems of the telling rather than the problems of the represented. Kathleen Wall explains this key difference very well:

If there are, then, no fully reliable narrators, how do we recognize an unreliable one? . . . First, unreliable narration is invariably signaled by the author in the form of verbal or mental habits that would problematize narration of the issues at hand. Or there are contradictions or inconsistencies in the diegesis that undermine or question the accuracy of the narrative. These verbal habits and diegetic inconsistencies must be presented as more than interesting and human aspects of character; they must problematize, complicate, or undermine our understanding of the central issues of the work as a whole.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, we might often see “narrative reliability,” especially in the form of “unreliable narration,” as a device of metafictional comment. Although there will be sufficient room for discussion about it in this study, I would like to suggest here that there are multiple ways to textually mark an erosion of narrative reliability, which are in general clearly traceable when the narrator is intended to appear unmistakably unreliable, as it is the case with Shreve McCannon. These textual ways include, for instance, specifying the narrator’s limited knowledge; a highly personalized voice whose prejudices, interpretations, and judgments are signaled as conflicting with the expectations of a more neutral rendering of the story; the use of language in the narrative; the

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<sup>33</sup> Kathleen Wall, “*The Remains of the Day* And Its Challenges to Theories of Unreliable Narration.” *Journal of Narrative Technique* 24 (1994): 39.

explicit manipulation, transformation or invention of characters or episodes; the existence of explicit motivations that invite the voice to manipulate the story; the presence of factual contradictions in the narrative; the undermining of narrative authority through, for instance, narrative levels or through orality; the juxtaposition of narrative voices; or the exposure of conflicting ideologies, to name just a few. Several concepts have emerged from this complex interplay, which denote the distinctions between kinds of narrators or kinds of unreliability. Three of them are especially relevant for my argument.

In terms of the debate about how much the narrator's knowledge can help us identify "unreliable" narration, Wayne Booth, followed by Phelan and Martin, and Olson, have established a distinction between those narrators who do not report accurately—in relation to what the text as a whole seems to convey—because they do not have sufficient knowledge, and those who do not report accurately because they do not want to, so they manipulate the story in order to offer what is in fact a pretended Truth. Olson has named the former "fallible narrators," and the latter "untrustworthy narrators," as we will see.<sup>34</sup> This distinction is going to be useful for us since all character-narrators in these novels are "fallible" in the sense that they do not have enough information to piece together the story they are trying to rescue from the archives of memory. However, Marlow, Mr Compson and Shreve are conscious of that insufficiency, which makes it difficult to classify them as "unreliable," or even to place them in the same category, since lack of knowledge does not always prevent each one of them, or in the same degree, from manipulating the story. The diversity of forms in which the voices relate to knowledge, truth, and manipulation renders that classification limited, however much the mere idea that the narrators have insufficient knowledge helps us to group them under the label "fallible." This prompts Phelan and Martin to see narrators as combining at different times in the narrative different ways of narrating, or simultaneous factors that are clustered in one narrative voice.

As another significant distinction, both Phelan and Martin, and Dorrit Cohn have introduced the idea that "unreliability" sometimes seems to refer to the reporting of facts, and sometimes implies the judgments

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<sup>34</sup> Phelan and Martin have textually indicated this difference referring to "misreporting," "misreading," "misregarding" (or "misevaluating") against "underreporting," "underreading," and "underregarding."

that compel the reader to see a story from a particular ideological or moral point of view, which, when it is undermined by the novel as a whole results in what Cohn has labeled “discordant narration.” Thus “discordant narration” makes sense when there is indication that the narrative voices’ judgment is so misleading that it has a detrimental effect on the rendering of the story. Although Cohn attributes “discordant narration” to what are understood as clearly “untrustworthy voices,” Marlow’s narrative voice in *Lord Jim* demonstrates that this is rather a device to measure the degree of narrative reliability. Accordingly, many of the factors the critics have detected as partaking in the process of creating “unreliability” seem to be extendable to a wider range of explorations that, while not classifiable as “unreliability,” nevertheless primarily discuss the problem of reliability. Among these the idea of persuasion in conjunction with the narrative enigma as a source that distinguishes Marlow and Mr Compson’s voices is remarkably significant in the interrogation of the credibility of narrative voice. We shall define and analyse closely at all these narrative concepts and principles at work in chapters 2 and 4.

While I hope that my choice of Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* should already seem an appropriate one for the purposes I have outlined, a few indications might be useful to foreground the specific basis of comparison that the study as a whole serves to justify. Among the objections that might be raised against this selection at first glance, I might anticipate primarily their geographic and temporal distance, and the choice of these particular novels for comparison instead of others that might appear more suitable.<sup>35</sup> Let me begin by saying that my goal of offering a close reading of the texts and engaging in a detailed historical analysis drove me to reduce the project to a comparison of just two novels, not because others would not have suited my argument, but rather because I wanted my project to rest as securely as possible upon a judiciously selected, thoroughly exhaustive and up-to-date

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<sup>35</sup> There are some figures that seem to establish a strong connection between these two authors, such as the enigmatic B. Traven, who as a contemporary of Faulkner explored an imaginarium of the sea and the revolutions in a reflection about the dynamics of colonial power and local populations, a reference I owe to the generosity of professor Ucelay Da Cal; and such as Stephen Crane, in his narration of the Civil War and his elaboration of narrative perspective. Albeit unexplored here, they seem to offer a way of expanding the comparison I am making in this dissertation.

bibliography, and on the basis of a textual analysis. The project deals with a wide range of sources, from strict narrative theory to straightforward historical studies, criticism on Faulkner and Conrad and their specific novels from both perspectives, as well as some contemporary accounts that touch upon both fiction and history. The depth of analysis aimed at in this work thus demanded a narrow focus that would permit two canonical figures and two widely recognized and difficult novels in the history of modern literature to be apprehended at work, and to serve as case studies that, taken together, would shed light on how to read the intersections of “race” and narrative voice, and by extension of social conflict and narrative form.

The choice of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner could be simply justified by citing their inclusion under the label of what has come to be known as “Modernism”—even though Conrad is sometimes left out. An enormous amount of criticism has been written in relation to that literary movement, and the scope of this critical literature continues to expand to new terrains and broader horizons such as the following:<sup>36</sup> the study of the relations between Modernist texts and the cultural and historical realities that surrounded their creation—and thus modifying the long-standing exclusive focus on what is, however, an inescapably overwhelming presence of narrative exploration in those texts—,<sup>37</sup> including the recent explorations of the relations of “race” and “imperialism” with “Modernism,” amongst which we might insert this study,<sup>38</sup> the less rigid distinctions between “high” and

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<sup>36</sup> A very good synthetic overview of all the expansions of the field I mention is provided by the two-volume history of Modernism: Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska, eds., *Modernism*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007. See also, Michael H. Whitworth, *Modernism*. Blackwell Guides to Criticism. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> For example, Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. Rachel Potter, *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900-1930*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006; Bryony Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007; Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999; Bonnie Kime Scott, ed., *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2007; Morag Shiach, *Modernism, Labour and Selfhood in British Literature and Culture, 1890-1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004; Celia Marshik, *British Modernism and Censorship*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson, and Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990; Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, eds., *Modernism and Empire*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000; David Adams, *Colonial Odysseys: Empire and Epic in the Modernist Novel*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2003.

“low” literature;<sup>39</sup> the geographical expansion to other contexts in which narrative exploration and some of the thematic motivations of the period are also manifested, especially the colonial and postcolonial context, with books such as Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*;<sup>40</sup> or the loosening of temporal boundaries by searching for continuities in motives and in narrative technique further in the past—studying for example the relations of Modernism with Joseph Conrad, Henry James, or even Edgar Allan Poe, as well as with what seemed distinguishable as the “Romantic” or “Victorian literature,” on the one hand,<sup>41</sup> and going forward in time to what has been referred to as the “Postmodernist literature” after the Second World War—relating William Faulkner, for example, with later metafictional or highly sophisticated technical experiments such as the works of Vladimir Nabokov, Italo Calvino, or Jorge Luis Borges, to mention just a few.<sup>42</sup> In any case, and considering that attempts at classification are still indispensable for comprehension, one focal point that still partially redeems the label of “Modernism” is the intensity with which a numerous corpus of works between the late nineteenth-century and the first four decades of the twentieth experimented with narrative technique, above all with time in the narrative and narrative voice, along with other factors such as irony and intertextuality. We indeed find during the period (roughly and conventionally measured from 1890 to 1940) greater preoccupation with the subject as a consciousness—both conscious and unconscious, rational and

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<sup>39</sup> Ian Willison, Warwick Gould and Warren Chernaik, *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace*. London and New York: MacMillan Press and St. Martin’s Press, 1996; Maria DiBattista and Lucy McDiarmid, *High and Low Moderns: Literature and Culture, 1889-1939*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.

<sup>40</sup> William Calin, *Minority Literatures and Modernism: Scots, Breton, and Occitan, 1920-1990*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2000; Mats Jansson, Jakob Lothe, and Hannu Riikenon, eds., *European and Nordic Modernisms*. Norwich: Norvik Press, 2004; Carol Dell’Amico, *Colonialism and the Modernist Moment in the Early Novels of Jean Rhys*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>41</sup> See Herbert N. Schineidau, *Waking Giants: The Presence of the Past in Modernism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991; Geoff Gilbert, *Before Modernism Was: Modern History and the Constituency of Writing*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004; Philip M. Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005; Andrea Zengulys, *Modernism and the Locations of Literary Heritage*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> See for example Leonard Diepeveen’s *The Difficulties of Modernism*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003; Madelyn Detloff, *The Persistence of Modernism: Loss and Mourning in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009; William Calin, op. cit.; Philip M. Weinstein, op. cit.; Richard Lehan, *Literary Modernism and Beyond: The Extended Vision and the Realms of the Text*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2009.

irrational—inspired by the works of the mid- and late-nineteenth century philosophy and the emergence of psychology, but also reacting to deep social transformations and historical upheavals, such as urbanization, industrialization, technological development, and intense colonization among countless other factors that have been used to explain the emergence of the “Modern world” and, consequently, the emergence of the “Modern novel.” Admittedly, any attempt to define a new context will stumble at the outset because, although societies change, history is a *continuum* which presents constant ruptures at different levels. This makes any attempt to define a movement or a cohesive grouping in the history of literature necessarily complicated. Acknowledging the fact—perhaps even following this perspective—that the moments in which Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner wrote could be covered by the umbrella of “Modernism” or, rather less challengingly “the Modern novel,” my aim is not to thereby demonstrate that they should be regarded as being the same, but rather that the problems with which their novels are concerned can be seen as confronted and resolved in similar ways in their narratives, because they seem to find parallel solutions. Thus, in spite of all the caveats and my own reluctance to see them as essentially belonging to “Modernism,” I nonetheless assume the broader concept of the Modern novel insofar as these literary works made their individual deep transformation of narrative form into their fundamental way of telling their authors’ anxieties, both personal and historical. In spite of my reservations, therefore, my claim is that in novels in which the salient exploration of narrative form is deeply entangled with the troubled presentation of historical tensions, there is a pressing need to analyze the interplay of these two narrative aspects within the texts, because it is the only way to understand both the effectiveness of narrative devices and the capacity of literature to express the world that has produced it. Consequently, it is precisely in what we have loosely referred to as the Modern novel—though in no way exclusively—where this approach should result in the most insightful explanations of both the formal and the social in narrative fiction.

But if my reference to the “Modern novel” as an umbrella has roughly sustained my choice of these two writers, David Minter’s inventory of some of their important points of contact provides a better justification for why Conrad and Faulkner deserve a comparative study. Minter, in his excellent biography of the Mississippian writer,

synthesizes what Conrad's writings inspired in Faulkner's narrative from the beginning: his use of impressionistic techniques for "reclaiming melodramatic plots for serious fiction"; his presentation of the story through ways of seeing or looking in what Faulkner called "thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird"; a sympathetic attitude toward his narrators coupled with detachment from the action; his narrators' habitual confusion and puzzlement in relation to the story they are telling, echoing the reader's difficulties of apprehension; and his elaboration of "techniques that later allowed him to use actions that were horrendous or preposterous, sentimental or melodramatic, without committing himself to them unambiguously."<sup>43</sup> Certainly, it is primarily in the way these authors treat narrative technique that we can see the grounds for comparison. But there is more to it. The way these authors lived and experienced history also determined their literature in similar ways, as we have observed already, and as we shall see in more detail below. An extended, detailed, and conclusive analysis of the shared aspects that constitute the common ground between Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner by Grazyna Branny, in her first chapter of *Conflict of Values: Alienation and Commitment in the Novels of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner*, shall provide sufficient information to firmly establish the correspondences between the authors. For reasons of brevity, unfortunately I can not address all the aspects that she so carefully details, and so I urge the reader to refer to that study where she or he may find not only evidence of Joseph Conrad's "influence" on William Faulkner, but also general observations and specific references to studies that, focusing on biography, moral values, literary influences, their relation to the transformation of the Modern World, and the exploration of form, fully demonstrate the suitability of the comparison.<sup>44</sup> The interest of prominent critics such as Albert J. Guerard, James Lawrence Guetti, Jr., Frederick R. Karl, J. Hillis Miller, Jakob Lothe, Stephen M. Ross, Donald Kartiganer, or Peter Mallios in the treatment of both novels or both authors does not look strange from this point of view.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> David Minter, *William Faulkner: His Life and Work*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980, 49. On the other hand, find the excellent biography of Joseph Conrad in Zdzislaw Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Life*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Grazyna Branny, *Conflict of Values: Alienation and Commitment in the Novels of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Spons, 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist*. Harvard: Harvard UP, 1966; and *The Triumph of the Novel: Dickens, Dostoevsky, Faulkner*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976; James Lawrence Guetti, Jr., *The Limits of Metaphor: A Study of Melville, Conrad, and Faulkner*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1967; Frederick R. Karl's two biographies: *Joseph Conrad: Three*

Finally, whereas the study of practically any two works by Conrad and Faulkner would have suited my purpose just as well, as Stephen M. Ross argues “Conrad’s influence is nowhere more evident than in *Absalom, Absalom!*, where Faulkner has assimilated techniques, ideas and even scenes from various Conrad works, especially *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness*” (“Conrad’s Influence 199). *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are strikingly similar in their ways of addressing the problem of reliability through a narrative enigma that generates room not only for multiple voices but also for a process of persuasion and a narration by conjecture which establishes a profound narrative ambivalence. Likewise, these two novels constrain within their fictions the tensions which arise from the overwhelming presence of the discourses of “race” in their historical contexts, bringing into the narrative through the multiple forms of the stereotypes and a sophisticated subjection of the fixed codes to the narrative principles, a complex racialization of the fiction which is, nevertheless, questioned in its interplay with the eroded credibility of the narrative voice. Although very similar effects are found in the novels *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and *Heart of Darkness*, on the one hand, and *Light in August* on the other, the detail in the analysis that I needed to introduce with each particular insight within each of the two novels determined not only the way I read them as part of the development of my argument but also my contributions to their specific critical interpretation—such as for example the notion that Marlow and Mr Compson are not unreliable voices and that Shreve is, or that the stereotypes of the English gentleman in *Lord Jim* and the mulatto character in *Absalom, Absalom!* need to be analyzed in order to understand the novels—forced me to limit the study to these in so many respects twin novels.

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*Lives*. London: Faber & Faber, 1979, and *William Faulkner: American Writer*. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989; J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982; and by the same author “Two Relativisms: Point of View and Indeterminacy in the Novel *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Relativism in the Arts*. Ed. Betty Jean Craige. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1983; Jakob Lothe, *Conrad’s Narrative Method*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989; and “Repetition and Narrative Method: Hardy, Conrad, Faulkner.” *Narrative: From Malory to Motion Pictures*. London: Edward Arnold, 1985. 117-132; Stephen M. Ross, *Faulkner’s Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1989; and “Conrad’s Influence on Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Studies in American Fiction* 2 (1974): 199-209; Donald M. Kartiganer, *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner’s Novels*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1979; and “The Divided Protagonist: Reading as Repetition and Discovery.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 30.2 (Summer 1988): 161-67; Peter Mallios, *Our Conrad: American Transnational Self-Imaginings, 1914-1939*. Stanford: Stanford UP, forthcoming.

Even though the arrangement of the chapters adheres to the conventional disposition of discussing first one novel followed by the other, it should nevertheless serve to make my argument more accessible. *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are extremely difficult novels because they comprise many characters, confusing plots, ambiguous narrative voices, and intense fragmentation and temporal changes. Since I do not “explain” the novels but directly analyze them, I thought it would be convenient to keep the mind of the reader fully occupied with one novel at a time when moving from narrative voice to racial representation, so that the interplay of these two aspects would be clearer. However, I could have easily changed the order by discussing first narrative voice and then racial representation in each novel, in order to highlight the similarities and differences between these aspects in both works. In any case, both interrelations—between aspects and between novels—are equally important, for which reason I ask the reader to keep in mind *Lord Jim* when I discuss *Absalom, Absalom!* The last chapter serves as the conclusion of my study, finally drawing the comparisons based upon the arguments put forward in each of the chapters, thus underscoring the importance of the comparative method.

Briefly, chapter 2 analyzes narrative voice in *Lord Jim* through the idea of how the novel addresses narrative reliability by means of the source to the narrative enigma and a process of persuasion conducted by Charlie Marlow, which results in an ambivalent narrative voice that is simultaneously endorsed and questioned in the narrative.

Chapter 3 examines racial representation in this novel through the distinction of the stereotypes or codified ideas of the Exotic, the English gentleman, the pilgrims, the Malays, the half-castes, and the conventions of the travel narrative and the Adventure novel. This section argues that Marlow questions the stereotype of the English gentleman as defined by his whiteness throughout the narrative, by relating imperialist ideas about the colonizer to Jim’s deed of abandoning the ship *Patna*. In spite of the gradual revelation of Jim’s doubtful morality as well as of the code he stands for, Marlow’s determination to preserve Jim as ‘one of us’ pushes him to insert a strong racial bias into the telling of his story, principally reinforced in the second part of the novel.

Chapter 4, in part II, discusses narrative voice in *Absalom, Absalom!* invoking the same problems of epistemology, the limits of language, the narrative enigma, and the multiplicity of narrative voices that have organized the study of this feature in *Lord Jim*. I argue that William Faulkner's novel explores the problem of narrative reliability through the elaboration of multiple narrative voices, which shape several degrees of reliability and the juxtaposition of which establishes a narrative progression that drives the reader towards an unreliable account of Sutpen's story, locating the novel as a whole on unstable ground.

Finally, chapter 5 discloses the uses of the racial stereotypes operative in the Myth of the South, including slavery, the mulatto characters, miscegenation, the images of the Anglo-Saxon gentleman and poor whites, and the Haitian Revolution, in order to reveal how the presentation of race gradually displays a racialization of the story that is finally almost exclusively focused on the debates over miscegenation, which constituted the cornerstone of the Jim Crow system of segregation.

My analyses have finally led me to conclude in last chapter that the process of racialization of the narrative enigma, towards which the narrative of the story progresses, establishes a complex dynamics with the gradual uncovering (in *Lord Jim*) or development (in *Absalom, Absalom!*) of a questioned reliability of the narrative voice in the novels. This interplay draws a narrative tension through the construction of a narrative ambivalence that parallels the tensions existent both in the historical context that produced the novels, and in the criticism of the credibility of discourses (both historical and fictional) resulting from these social tensions. It is in this sense that I hope to make clear how both Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner manage to transform social conflict into a reflection about narrative form, as well as how their exploration of narrative voice allows them to express specific historical tensions. In this way, I try to establish in both novels the interrelations that Jakob Lothe found crucial, yet complicated, when he argued that "the relation of a systematic investigation of Conrad's narrative method to literary characteristics connected with, though not necessarily directly conditioned by, historical developments is very complicated, and cannot be other than summarily considered here. . . . a study of narrative method requires rather detailed close readings which complicate, though they may

invite, consideration of interpretative problems that are historical, sociological, and cultural rather than structural and textual” (*Conrad’s* 5). It is thanks to the many excellent studies that, like Lothe’s, have been undertaken in the several decades of criticism of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner that I have felt the impulse to attempt to cover some of the undeniably complex relations between narrative form and historical context with which these writers struggled, in order to provide an artistic shape for their historical circumstances, experiences, and emotions, transforming these into major literary works. In their efforts they were neither alone nor neglected, since they shared the preoccupations of many authors before and after, among which those mentioned at the beginning of this introduction are outstanding examples. It is precisely because of their acknowledged contribution to what can be regarded as the fundamental concerns of the literary art that they have deserved my most dedicated attention.

**PART I**

Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*



## 2. GAINING CONVICTION IN *LORD JIM*: MARLOW, A QUESTIONED STORYTELLER

Joseph Conrad's overt claim of narrative method as a central axis of his literary work struck the very founder of the Modern novel Henry James. The prominent writer states in his complex essay "The New Novel" when commenting on Conrad's *Chance* that

What concerns us is that the general effect of *Chance* is arrived at by a pursuance of means to the end in view contrasted with which every other current form of the chase can only affect us as cheap and futile; the carriage of the burden or amount of service required on these lines exceeding surely all other such displayed degrees of energy put together. Nothing could well interest us more than to see the exemplary value of attention, attention given by the author and asked of the reader, attested in a case in which it has had almost unspeakable difficulties to struggle with—since so we are moved to qualify the particular difficulty Mr. Conrad has 'elected' to face: the claim for method in itself, method in this very sense of attention applied, would be somehow less lighted if the difficulties struck us as less consciously, or call it even less wantonly, invoked.<sup>46</sup>

However, as contemporaries and friends these two writers traced a path of continuity in the development of the technique of narrative voice in literature. Both stretched the device to its furthest limits with such energy that ultimately Conrad, building on James' masterful efforts, brought narrative voice to a point of near exhaustion, a condition that bordered upon its own parody. Certainly, Conrad's sophisticated use of narrative voice brings the storyteller to a degree of artistry dangerously resembling "mockery," to use Marlow's own words quoted in the next chapter.

A closer look at the history of voice in narrative allows us to see that Henry James implemented what is regarded today as a literary step in his working of an "indirect narrative approach through the sensitive central intelligence of one of the characters" and his retention of "a

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<sup>46</sup> Henry James, *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford UP, 1948, 203. See for the relations between Joseph Conrad and Henry James, Keith Carabine and Owen Knowles with Paul Armstrong, eds., *Conrad, James and Other Relations*. Boulder and Lublin: Social Science Monographs and Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, 1998.

discreet form of authorial narrative” which for “both his selection of a particular registering consciousness, and the terms in which he presented it, implied the full understanding of that consciousness.”<sup>47</sup> Authorial voice as a distanced third-person that is at the same time a personal one would create a halfway point between the first-person narrative and the more distant omniscient narrative voice that remained dominant up to the late nineteenth century. Joseph Conrad spun the thread of the formal development of the novel by adopting a further major expansion of the possibilities of narrative voice. Marlow’s narratives in general serve as experimenting fields in this sense. The development of the figure of what James calls “creators” or “producers” of stories in what we know today as “narrators” in Conrad’s Marlowian narratives is splendid. The storytellers begin to split and they fragment the story to offer a shiny mosaic that provides a general picture blighted by the blurred junctures of the little pieces, which leave out important information related to the story. If the image of the mosaic serves to evoke the conjunction of multiple voices the juxtaposition of which allows the reader to gather a general picture from a distance; the image of voices with the shape of water ripples one begetting the other more accurately reflects the working of the voices in different narrative levels in Marlow’s novels, as we are going to see in the particular case of *Lord Jim*. In addition to the multiplying of narrators and the working with several narrative levels, Conrad took the authorial voice further by highly personalizing the narrator and by locating it in a complex relation to the story: Marlow is an homodiegetic narrator, an insider of the diegesis, who tells his experiences but who focuses the story mainly on other characters, and sometimes just one, such as Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* and Jim in *Lord Jim*.<sup>48</sup> Given this focalization, though Marlow tells his own story, he is telling the story of another character in a narrative strategy that differs

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<sup>47</sup> Ian Watt, “Marlow and Henry James.” *Marlow*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992, 101.

<sup>48</sup> Gérard Genette distinguishes between “heterodiegetic” and “homodiegetic” narrators when he identifies “deux types de récits: l’un à narrateur absent de l’histoire qu’il raconte, l’autre à narrateur présent comme personnage dans l’histoire qu’il raconte. Je nomme le premier type, pour des raisons évidentes, *hétérodiégétique*, et le second *homodiégétique*.” (*Figures III*. Paris: Seuil, 1972, 252). Amongst the homodiegetic narrators, Genette distinguishes between those who are protagonists of the story which he labels “autodiegetic,” and those that are secondary characters, who are not deserving of any particular name. The latter often appear as observers or witnesses of the story. These distinctions define the relationship between the narrators and the story and their location in terms of narrative levels, independently of their use of the first, second, or third personal pronoun they use to narrate.

from romantic first-person narratives such as Goethe's *Werther*.<sup>49</sup> It is precisely in this sense, hitherto not practiced in the history of narrative forms, that Marlow as narrator seems to unsettle James. As the prominent writer's critical eye reluctantly observes,

Mr. Conrad's first care on the other hand is expressly to posit or set up a reciter, a definite responsible intervening first person singular, possessed by infinite sources of reference, who immediately proceeds to set up another, to the end that this other may conform again to the practice, and that even at that point the bridge over to the creature, or in other words to the situation or the subject, the thing 'produced,' shall, if the fancy takes it, once more and yet once more glory in a gap.  
(204)

Conrad's breaking of "the general law in fiction" troubles James. In James' understanding of narrative, "we take for granted by the general law of fiction a primary author, take him so much for granted that we forget him in proportion as he works upon us, and that he works upon us most in fact by making us forget him." Instead, Conrad's first-person narrator is endowed with an 'omniscience' that is "a prolonged hovering flight of the subjective over the outstretched ground of the case exposed. We make out this ground but through the shadow cast by the flight" (204). In his fine essay "Marlow and Henry James," Ian Watt reports the same James' implicit criticism here addressed in a more roughly informal commentary on Marlow. Watt explains that "in a diary entry of 5 January 1903, Olive Garnett reports Elsie Hueffer as telling her that James 'objected to the narrator mixing himself up with the narrative in 'The Heart of Darkness' & its want of proportion; said that we didn't really get hold of Kurtz after all the talk about him'" (103). In this objection, another leap in narrative voice in the Modern novel is foreshadowed.

My argument in this chapter is that this further involvement in the elaboration of narrative voice explores, albeit along with other aspects, the problem of narrative reliability. Accordingly, some theoretical observations on narrative reliability shall be pertinent here in order to

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<sup>49</sup> I understand "focalization" as Mieke Bal does, and which Genette had previously described in *Figures III*. In Bal's words: "I shall refer to the relations between the elements presented and the vision through which they are presented with the term *focalization*. Focalization is, then, the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen,' perceived." (*Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 1980. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985, 100).

fully comprehend Conrad's innovations in the field. Reliability implies the credibility of the narrative voice in the telling of the story. A great deal of productive effort has been expended in narrative theory to define some of the most challenging innovations generated by authors out of this central concern. In their analyses of this innovative device, narratologists have in particular constrained the debate within a rather rigid opposition of reliable/unreliable narration, discussed in the introduction. These distinctions have sharpened our perceptions of narrative voice and have enabled a full understanding of the technique of narrative unreliability. Nonetheless, by establishing such a rigid opposition, they have mostly overlooked the problem these innovations had addressed, namely that of narrative reliability of discourses and in fiction.<sup>50</sup> When referring to reliability, thus, I do not mean a reliable trustworthy voice, but rather the very "problem of trusting" as enacted in narrative voice. That means that the concern of narrative reliability involves all the modulations of narrative voice concerned with trust and credibility in fiction, as well as all the resources that contribute to dealing with this problem in the narrative. In their dealing with this concern, Conrad and Faulkner work with narrative distance and persuasion, which they construct through the narrative enigma as a structural knot, through access to knowledge, narrative authority, the use of narrative levels, the characterization of narrators, the multiplicity of voices, and orality. All of these principles shall be explored in both novels in accordance to their relevance, in order to comprehend how both authors innovate in the construction of narrative voice.

Going back to James' impressions, Conrad's long ignored narrative sophistication might have its origin in the notion of the enigma or the secret, which allowed the development of narrative voice in the ways already described. Indeed, Ricardo Piglia has convincingly argued for the secret as the nest of the Modern novel, since

el secreto sería un lugar vacío que permite unir tramas narrativas diversas y personajes distintos que conviven en un espacio atados por ese nudo que no se explica. . . . Es decir, que el secreto funciona como un mecanismo de construcción de la trama porque permite unir sobre

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<sup>50</sup> I have only found one critic that has made this claim in studying the use of pronouns from a cognitive point of view. See Dieter Meindl, "(Un-)Reliable Narration from a Pronominal Perspective." *The Dynamics of Narrative Form: Studies in Anglo-American Narratology*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004. Ed. John Pier. 59-82.

un punto ciego una red de pequeñas historias que se articulan, de una manera inexplicable, pero que se articulan. De ahí la sensación de ambigüedad, de indecisión, de las múltiples significaciones que tiene una historia, porque inmediatamente nosotros empezamos a incorporar razones para hacer circular esa historia con un orden que, en realidad, el relato mismo ni nos desvela ni nos descubre.<sup>51</sup>

This leads him to suggest that “habría que pensar que la conexión con el secreto no sólo es el motor de la trama, sino también el nudo a partir del cual se teje ese texto múltiple; lo que no está narrado es lo que determina la condición y la complejidad de esta estructura múltiple.”<sup>52</sup> Gaps and shadows are, indeed, the main fabric of Conrad’s narratives, which demand from the reader to struggle to get closer to the unknown information in the same measure that is required from the narrators. In this sense, reader participation, already demanded by James, reaches the extreme of almost requiring the reorganization of information and further unavoidable interpretation, as Piglia observes. The powerful entrance of the Modern novel with its silences, reader participation, and the development of ‘multiple texts,’ seems clear.

In order to comprehend Conrad’s first steps in the field of the exploration of form, particular suggestive motives for his resource to the enigma, along with the genre of the detective novel from which Piglia mainly develops his argument, are provided by the unfairly neglected Spanish author Juan Benet. In his essay “Algo acerca del buque fantasma,” Benet strikingly describes what seems to him a mere intuition regarding the troubled passage to the Modern novel:

La novela del mar, en cuanto género, es una invención específica del siglo XIX que con él nació y casi murió con él. No puedo menos que relacionar esa aportación con la del otro género complementario y simultáneo, la novela de misterio, cuya función se comprende con cierta facilidad cuando se examina su posición dentro de una disciplina artística dirigida con el afán investigador que prevalecería en el siglo pasado.

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<sup>51</sup> Ricardo Piglia, “Secreto y narración. Tesis sobre la *nouvelle*.” *El arquero inmóvil: Nuevas poéticas sobre el cuento*. Ed. Eduardo Bécerra. Madrid: Páginas de espuma, 2006, 201.

<sup>52</sup> Piglia, “Blanco, aspectos de la *nouvelle*.” *Las lecciones del maestro: Homenaje a José Bianco*. Ed. Daniel Balderston. Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo editora, 2006, 253.

. . . Pero en la leyenda del buque fantasma ocurren ciertas cosas que invitan a pensar. La invención del misterio (en la novela de ese nombre o en cualquier otro género, clásico o moderno, de análoga configuración) cumple un doble objeto al poner de manifiesto el interés que despierta todo enigma y al sacar todo el provecho de la intriga que despierta el curso de la investigación, el suspense, como ahora se llama. El enigma se inventa para ser resuelto, un esquema que se reitera desde *Edipo, rey* hasta la novela policíaca. La novela del mar, en contraste, está con mucha frecuencia aureolada—y no sé muy bien por qué—de una suerte de misterio permanente, de vagos y sutiles contornos, acaso alimentado de esa impenetrable e incesante movilidad de un medio al que el hombre se asoma *ansioso de anticipar su tumba* haciéndose eco de toda su imaginaria reserva, retrocediendo en la edad del saber hacia aquella ingenua y comprometida ignorancia.

Pero la leyenda del buque fantasma—y me refiero con ello tanto a la popular que Wagner debió oír en Pillau o a la transposición novelesca que se viene haciendo desde el capitán Marryat, como a la reducción y sublimación a pura estampa en que el escritor romántico resumió tantas veces cierto afán de liberación—el misterio prevalece, es un fin en sí mismo que no se puede ni debe ser resuelto y que cobra todo su valor por su carácter absurdo, fantástico y fatídico. Al final de aquel capítulo X de *Las aventuras de Arturo Gordon Pym*, cuando el *Grampus* se cruza con aquel sobrecogedor bergantín holandés pintado de negro que pasa de largo haciendo guiñadas, tripulado por cadáveres y perseguido por las gaviotas que se alimentan de ellos, Poe dice muy expresivamente que “es inútil tratar de hacer conjeturas donde todo está rodeado, y seguramente lo seguirá estando siempre, del más insondable y pavoroso misterio.”<sup>53</sup>

I have quoted Benet extensively because in his intuition there is what I see as a revelation of one of the terrains in which modern forms originated. Benet's last image immediately calls to our minds the intriguing seafaring story *Benito Cereno*. It is precisely at this point where we find it reasonable to suggest that the unsolved enigma—materialized in the motif of the ghost vessel as described by Benet—was already within the genre of the novel of the sea. This is the fruit of a transatlantic tradition—which included, among others, works by James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen Crane and Walt Whitman, and later Jack London in North America, and following the tradition of Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Captain Marryat or R. M. Ballantyne in Britain, to name just a few—that in diverse forms and on various levels located

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<sup>53</sup> Juan Benet, *La inspiración y el estilo*. 1966. Madrid: Alfaguara, 1999, 180.

the moral dilemmas of humankind in a maritime setting. Herman Melville and later Joseph Conrad found in the mystery of the sea the mystery of life that mirrored the mystery of its narration, thus, “retrocediendo en la edad del saber hacia aquella ingenua y comprometida ignorancia.” Marlow, as his creator, is overwhelmed by the complexity of life and by its ineffability. In the experience of the sea lies the impossibility of its transmission, which is precisely the point that compels both Melville and Conrad to see in it a microcosm of life and human uncertainty in a too complex world. I depart from Benet’s idea that Conrad did not need this mystery in his novels of the sea, and that for this reason he turned landward in his writing. Benet’s great appreciation of *Lord Jim*’s mysterious atmosphere suggests, in spite of his own claims, another way of reading Conrad’s elaboration of the enigma, which the literature of the sea concentrates into a factual motif (the ghost ship) but which in the transition carried on by Melville we already find assuming a broader significance that embraces the problem of human epistemology. The mystery of life, the uncertainty of knowledge, and the frustration produced by the failure of language to communicate both, originate in this particular genre in Conrad’s fiction and will join the modern concerns that come from the literary tradition to which Henry James belongs.

Hence, Conrad deals with the problem of narrative reliability by employing the enigma as a centre in narrative structure which allows him, as Piglia suggests, to develop several narrative voices that attempt to approach the gap in information so as to attain a certain sense of the story they are telling. Specifically, in this chapter I am going to analyze the ways Conrad, in dealing with the representation of the problem of reliability in narrative works, utilises silenced or missing information to build not only weak and dubious narrative voices but, more importantly, as a fertile ground for constructing a persuasive narrative that takes advantage of gaps to suggest and reshape the story according to personal interests.<sup>54</sup> From my point of view, Marlow’s human “weakness,” of which he is nonetheless fully sentient, leads him back to his protective shell when doubts and mist happen to blind him. His involvement in the story and with his main character, Jim, will lead him to a complex relationship in which remaining distanced

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<sup>54</sup> Later in his career, this strategy will also be developed in *Under Western Eyes*. See especially Eloise Knapp Hay’s “*Under Western Eyes* And the Missing Center.” *Joseph Conrad’s Under Western Eyes: Beginnings, Revisions, Final Forms*. Ed. David R. Smith. Handem: Archon Books, 1991. 121-153.

ultimately proves impossible in practice, an effect James was of course not unaware of. Persuasion would be the most effective way of conducting a story quite satisfactorily when no path is determined because of the incessant impediments that obstruct the narrative. Since the plot cannot follow the story's linear logic because secrets and gaps remain at the centre, Marlow becomes the conductor of the orchestra, directing the plot with his decisions and holding to certain narrative voices at particular moments.

Furthermore, it can even be stated that it is Marlow himself who puts Jim's secret at the heart of the matter, since the facts of the story are clear; only Jim's intentions and the inconsistency of Jim's appearance with his actions give rise to what becomes the secret *for* Marlow, who is certain the issue of the jump is much less clear than it appears to be. By placing his doubt about Jim at the centre of the narrative, Marlow uses it as the narrative enigma of his storytelling. This allows him to provide the story with a strong moral orientation, which in turn will invite much more "judgment," opinion, and interpretation. It is through this strategy that Marlow can finally develop his own story of Jim, selecting his complementary voices, choosing the events to be recounted and drawing upon his ample storytelling skills. In the end, his voice results in being so strongly persuasive that it spreads a temporary mantle of safety over both Marlow and the remembered Jim. Eventually, the enigma will extend to collective identities, which shall generalize the moral doubts and make persuasion central to the representation of "race" in *Lord Jim*.

In this chapter, therefore, I aim to analyse narrative voice in *Lord Jim* in order to unveil the aforementioned ideas. For this purpose, I will pay attention to the enigma; the different narrative voices that contribute to the story, and their authority; the narrative levels in which they work; Marlow's voice regarding the problems of epistemology and narrative ineffability; the process of persuasion Marlow is subjected to by Jim and the audiences by Marlow; and the different ingredients in the novel that provide readers with grounds to fix their attention on the method in order to be able to question it, such as in the very ironical effect it had in James' decision to comment on it.

## 2. 1. The secret, multiplicity of narrative voices, and narrative authority

*Lord Jim* is one of those novels where narrative voices do not come to an agreement about a story. This is possible because there is something unknown to the main narrators, something that remains hidden, undecipherable to the tellers of the story and, therefore, to their proximate and future audiences. There is a secret in Jim's story that lies deep in his heart, inaccessible to curious spectators. It is also inaccessible to his privileged listener and ultimate teller of his story, Marlow.<sup>55</sup> Disagreements about Jim's life and personality surround the secret, which, formulated as a question, would be: Is Jim really who he appears to be? As F. R. Leavis observed, in *Lord Jim* "Marlow is the means of presenting Jim with the appropriate externality, seen always through the question, the doubt, that is the central theme of the book."<sup>56</sup> Indeed, it is Marlow himself who poses the secret, who feels the need to investigate why a person that looked so "sound" and so much like "one of us" would act so improperly as to jump from a sinking ship onto a boat along with its white crew, leaving 800 pilgrims on board. As an example of how Marlow refers to his doubt, his first description is revelatory: "There he stood, clean-limbed, clean-faced, firm on his feet, as promising a boy as the sun ever shone on; and, looking at him, knowing all he knew and a little more too, I was angry as though I had detected him trying to get something out of me by false pretences. He had no business to look so sound."<sup>57</sup> Marlow continues by admitting that he "liked his appearance" because "he came from the right place; he was one of us" (30), yet this contrast between Jim's reprehensible deed and his appearance as an English gentleman disturbs him. Indeed, he declares: "I tell you I ought to know the right kind of looks. I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes—and, by Jove! it wouldn't have been safe. There are depths of horror in that thought. He looked as genuine as a new sovereign,

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<sup>55</sup> Although with different focus, Richard Pedot makes some observations on the role of silence in the novel in his article "'With sealed lips': The Engima of Rhetoric in *Lord Jim*." *L'Époque Conradienne*. Numéro spécial: *Lord Jim* 30 (2004): 185-196.

<sup>56</sup> F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*. New York: New York UP, 1964, 189.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*. 1900. A Norton Critical Edition. Ed. Thomas S. Moser. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996, 29. All subsequent quotations in this dissertation refer to this edition.

but there was some infernal alloy in his metal. How much? The least thing—the least drop of something rare and accursed; the least drop! —but he made you—standing there with his don't-care hang air—he made you wonder whether perchance he were nothing more rare than brass” (32).

The secret, which concerns both Jim's morality and fate as an individual, and the fate and power of the racial community he stands for, dominates Marlow's thoughts until it turns into a veritable obsession that drags the reader towards this epicenter of the narrative. The novel's perspective of Jim is thus oblique, bringing out in the telling “a darkness, an absence, a haze invisible in itself and only made visible by the ghostlike indirection of a light which is already derived. It is not the direct light of the sun but the reflected light of the moon which brings out the haze. This visible but secondary light and the invisible haze create a halo of ‘moonshine’ which depends for its existence on the reader's involvement in the play of light and dark which generates it,” as J. Hillis Miller describes it.<sup>58</sup> The secret is the absence the understanding of which is approached indirectly by Marlow and by the composition of sources that make the reader see it from his or her own perspective, “the thirteenth way of looking at a blackbird,” as Faulkner would put it.

In *Lord Jim*, as in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the secret in the story is placed as the narrative enigma. That is, the narrators use a relevant gap in the events or characters of the story as the motor, the node of the telling. The narrative enigma, thus, relies on a secret in the story to construct plot, to advance the narrative. This is not always the case, since in narrative texts the secret in the story is frequently shared by the narrator and by the readers. Here the narrator is not privy to some information in the story, and uses that fact to orchestrate a narrative. The gaps of information are thus twofold: they work as secret or mystery on the level of the story, and as narrative engine for narrative progression on the level of discourse. As noted above, when a novel makes a secret function as a narrative enigma, the secret invites speculation and disagreements from several narrative voices in *Lord Jim*, as in other novels by Conrad, which participate in a complex relationship with each other.

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<sup>58</sup> J. Hillis Miller, “*Lord Jim*: Repetition as Subversion of Organic Form.” *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982, 26.

An initial overview of the general working of narrative voice in the novel will facilitate the construction of my argument. The narrative structure of *Lord Jim* is rather complex, yet I will attempt to provide a rough outline. There is an external narrator who begins the narrative, narrates the first four chapters of the story, and frames the narrative. In the fourth chapter he focuses a white man that is present at the Inquiry, a mature sea master called Marlow, already familiar to Conrad's readers, who would become very involved in Jim's vital preoccupation with his abhorrent act of jumping from a sinking ship with 800 sleeping pilgrims on board. From this change on focus, the narrator would direct attention to Marlow and, in a sudden shift of time and space, would continue with the beginning of Marlow's long oral narrative, an internal narrative that would last until chapter XXXVI. At that point, the narrator brings Marlow's oral narration to a close in order to contextualize the written one to follow, which takes place more than two years after Marlow's oral account and which would contain the end of Jim's story. The intervention of the narrator introduces a new situation in which the privileged man reads several sheets of paper and an accompanying letter where Marlow recounts the end of Jim's story in Patusan. Marlow's words and last reflections on Jim's death close the novel.<sup>59</sup>

In his splendid and groundbreaking *Conrad's narrative method*, Jakob Lothe has analyzed the several narrative voices in *Lord Jim*, providing very intelligent insights that clarify a complex and understudied narrative structure. Though little can be added to this exceptional work, I will try to provide some complementary nuances to Lothe's analysis.<sup>60</sup> In *Lord Jim*, it seems that all the voices speculate around or can be related to the secret of Jim's personality, the correspondence between Jim's image and Jim's reality. Yet, in fact, most of the narrative voices remain subjected to Marlow's control of the telling.

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<sup>59</sup> I have not studied here an outpost of narrative voice in *Lord Jim*: the complex interplay between oral and written voices. This is because I analyse it deeply in relation to community of audiences and it is extremely relevant for racial representation. Thus, I study this feature of voice in depth in chapter 3, which in this novel fits better. To see formal wit distinctions about the realm of the oral/written narratives in *Lord Jim* not mentioned in chapter 4, see Raymond Gates Malbone, "How to Be': Marlow's Quest in *Lord Jim*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 10.4 (1965): 172-180; for the function of orality in the method of interpreting narratives, see Randall Craig's "Swapping yarns: the oral mode of *Lord Jim*." *Conradiana* 13.3 (1981): 181-193.

<sup>60</sup> Jakob Lothe, *Conrad's Narrative Method*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Certainly, apart from the first four chapters introduced by the frame narrator, the voices speak *through* Marlow's discourse, and therefore not as they would be selected by that 'other' of the third person, conventionally thought to be a more neutral and supposedly omniscient narrator found at the beginning of the novel. Conrad works with several narrative levels by placing the frame narrator's voice on the main or extradiegetic one, Marlow's on the intradiegetic, and finally the rest of the voices on the metadiegetic narrative level, that is within Marlow's discourse.<sup>61</sup>

This brings us to the question of narrative authority, which seems to be a surprisingly understudied feature of narrative voice, and to which Lothe has made a significant contribution, not only in his study of Conrad's narrative method but in his particular correlation of it with the construction of narrative reliability.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to many other dictionaries of narratology or literary theory which do not include the concept of "narrative authority," Gerald Prince's does, defining it as "the extent of a narrator's knowledge of the narrative situations and events," and associating it with the entry "privilege," which he describes as "a narrator's special right or ability. The narrator may be more or less privileged in knowing what cannot be known by strictly 'natural' means."<sup>63</sup> In the absence of more detailed definitions, I will venture to define "narrative authority" as the degree of credibility a narrative voice is endowed with by the fiction. Thus, narrative authority is the credibility that sources as knowledge and the translation of human qualities that provide reliability to discourse such as perception, precision of language, honesty of intentions, or

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<sup>61</sup> Gérard Genette defined this theoretical concept "Nous définirons cette différence de niveau en disant que *tout événement raconté par un récit est à un niveau diégétique immédiatement supérieur à celui où se situe l'acte narratif producteur de ce récit.*" (*Figures III* 238). Genette distinguishes between the extradiegetic narrative level as the most external one, not participative of the story; the intradiegetic level, in which embraces "les événements racontés dans ce premier récit" (238), and; the metadiegetic narrative level, that in which some events are told by a character narrator within the intradiegetic level.

<sup>62</sup> See the excellent overview of narrative theory in *Narrative in Fiction and Film: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. 25-27.

<sup>63</sup> Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1987, 9 and 77. Booth refers to it as "artificial authority," *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 4. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan's most recent *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) does not include the term.

eloquence, as well, concede to the voice in the narrative, measuring in several ways the distance between narrative voice and the story told.<sup>64</sup>

Conrad elaborates narrative authority in *Lord Jim* mainly through narrative levels. The frame narrator as a distant third-person voice is endowed by convention with a general authority over the narrative, which is enforced by its placement in the most external narrative level, and its consequent function of framing the narrative.<sup>65</sup> This voice introduces and chooses Marlow for the telling of Jim's story in its entirety, which lasts for the rest of the novel. Within Marlow's discourse we find a similar process of selection of voices that narrate episodes of the story. In bestowing the function of narrator on Marlow, the frame narrator transfers his own narrative authority to this narrator before the eyes of the reader. Furthermore, as Lothe observes,

The fact that this apparently omniscient narrator largely refrains from imposing evaluative judgements on Marlow can be interpreted as another indication of the narrative and thematic authority of Marlow as a personal narrator with an original and productive authorial function. (*Conrad's* 174)

This narrative authority is finally underscored by the fact that Marlow is allowed the privilege of closing the novel. No final declaration by the "privileged man" follows Marlow's writing, neither a revelation of his own opinions, nor the frame narrator's judgment of the general narrative situation, and no closure of the frame opened at the beginning of the novel detaches the reader from Marlow's own storytelling. Thus, since the frame narrator, who remains silent at the end, does not close Marlow's narration there is an imbalance between the narrative levels, since the novel never returns to the first narrative level, but rather begins with the frame narrator's and ends with that of Marlow's writing. With this gesture, the frame narrator affirms Marlow's authority over the final version of the story. James Phelan

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<sup>64</sup> In a pioneering study of narrative reliability, Susan Sniader Lanser addresses the problem of what she calls "mimetic authority" and refers to the axes of 'dissimulation-honesty,' 'unreliability-reliability,' and 'narrative incompetence-narrative skill' that would later be developed by critics of unreliable narration (*The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981, 171.

<sup>65</sup> Lothe describes the elasticity of Conrad's third-person narrators in "Conradian Narrative." *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 160-177.

has observed that “[a]lthough Conrad does not make Marlow a wholly reliable narrator . . . he does not do anything to undermine Marlow’s conclusion that Jim existed at the heart of an enigma,” and thus, the frame narrator does not question Marlow’s focalization of the enigma as the epicentre of the story.<sup>66</sup> As we are going to see further on, something analogous to this narrative effect takes place in *Absalom, Absalom!*, achieved through a very similar narrative structure. As a result of this treatment of narrative levels, narrative authority is given to both the frame narrator and to Marlow in the novel.

Yet, whereas the reader is unable to ascertain the real nature of the frame narrator or the extent of his knowledge, we certainly do know that Marlow is a character with a highly personal individual voice, profoundly affected by the story. As the novel makes evident, he indeed has a personality that contaminates his narration, and so any word or discourse uttered in his narration would be subject to his personal selection, ordering of events, and judgment. Marlow’s selection of voices and ordering of events in his telling is highlighted by three related narrative devices: repetition, “thematic apposition,” and the “associative method,” studied by Hillis Miller, Watt, and Lothe respectively with such accuracy that I remit to their studies for a deeper comprehension of this chapter.<sup>67</sup> Even though a process of selection must be assumed for every single narrator, it cannot be overlooked if the narrator is a defined character, especially when he is explicitly not pretending to be neutral and objective. Marlow warns the reader of his non-transferable personal perspective on Jim, as we know it only “second hand,” through his telling. This is in accordance with C. B. Cox’s perception that in *Lord Jim* characters

usually appear through the reflector of Marlow’s imagination, dressed in the forms of language deemed appropriate by him at some given moment. . . . When reading Conrad we often feel that his characters

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<sup>66</sup> James Phelan, “‘I affirm nothing’: *Lord Jim* and the Uses of Textual Recalcitrance: Jim’s Character and Experience as an Instance of the Stubborn.” *Joseph Conrad: Voice, Sequence, History, Genre*. Ed. Jakob Lothe, Jeremy Hawthorn, and James Phelan. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2008, 48.

<sup>67</sup> See J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*; Ian Watt, *Conrad in the nineteenth century*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1979; Jakob Lothe, *Conrad’s Narrative Method*.

exist only in the consciousness of a beholder, and their shape and quality depend on the perceiver's method of apprehension.<sup>68</sup>

I am not suggesting here that the reader should doubt the words given in quotations that Marlow reports, or in his descriptions in general; rather, I claim that she or he is solicited here to be more attentive to the narrator's literary representation than in other narrative texts. As any narration, Marlow's "human" or individual one, personified one, is subject to personal selection and presentation of the story. But the construction of the story is much further removed from objectivity if there is an aim pursued in the telling. As it shall become apparent in the course of my argument, Marlow does have a very precise objective in his narration: to persuade the reader about Jim's being "one of us," despite his moral misadventure. In this sense, as James perceived, the authority bestowed on this narrator is ultimately questioned by his exaggerated "intrusion" in the story and his aim to persuade his audience. In a literary technique very similar to that used in *Absalom, Absalom!*, therefore, the novel's questioning of its principal authorised storyteller leaves the reader without alternative narratives of the story.

Consequently, those multiple narrative voices, though not fully unauthorized since they are present in the novel, should not be removed from their proper, more internal narrative level to that of Marlow's narrative, which is the one that prevails in the novel. As voices subordinated to Marlow's account of the story, they never equal Marlow's narrative authority. Placed within Marlow's telling and therefore dependent on a suspect storyteller, the degree of authority apparently held by these other narrative voices is unsettled. This effect is reinforced by the fact that these voices are not allowed to fulfil a narrative but are just presented fragmentarily. Indeed, the multiple internal narrative voices work to illuminate Marlow's concerns and focus on the speculation about the knot of the secret that worries Marlow. Simultaneously, however—as we shall see further along—they function as flashes that make the reader aware of the possibility of other judgments and perspectives apart from Marlow's, yet without ever substituting his own.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> C. B. Cox, *Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons LTD; Totowa (NY): Rowman & Littlefield, 1974, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Ian Watt provides an interpretation that runs parallel to my own here, placing the role of the different voices in the novel. He considers the episodes of the hospital where the chief engineer is, and the episode of Brierly as it follows, which we seem to be able to generalise to many others: "there remains an insistent semantic gap

From this argumentation, it can be stated that only the frame narrator's and Marlow's should be considered as fully developed narrative voices of the story of Jim as it is presented in the novel. Other voices dependent on a defined character such as Marlow, though clearly distinguished, will be studied as reported voices within Marlow's narration in both their functioning to support his aims and to warn the reader. They help in the construction of the plot and in the approach toward the narrative enigma.

## 2. 2. The Frame Narrator: an approach to its functions

In belonging to the extradiegetic narrative level, the frame narrator's functions direct the general effects of the novel as a whole. Its main functions can be synthesized in three points: 1. It provides the reader with a general summary of Jim's story in a way that allows him to create suspense; 2. It introduces Marlow as the main storyteller in two different moments; 3. It functions to contrast Marlow's narrative of Jim so that Marlow's narrative reliability can be perceived as problematic to the reader.<sup>70</sup> Of these three, the last point is the most relevant to our argument.

For a deeper understanding of the figure of the frame narrator from the point of view of narrative structure, Lothe's stands out as the most

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which asks the reader to reconstitute all the literal details and the latent questions they provoke into a larger meaning which has been intimated, but not stated, by Marlow. That process of interrogation and reconstitution seems to impose itself the more readily because the formal structure of each scene has an exceptional degree of autonomy. The protagonist exists only for the sake of the episode—we hear no more of Brierly or the chief engineer; and the episode ends as soon as—spurred on by Marlow's teasing pressure—we have sufficiently interrogated it for ourselves, and tried to puzzle out how it helps us to see the general moral issues more clearly." (*Conrad in the nineteenth century* 280). I strongly recommend the reader this study for it is still now one of the most impressive analysis of *Lord Jim* and Conrad's literary work in general.

<sup>70</sup> The unknown, never-described, frame narrator of the novel, which begins telling Jim's story and continues framing Marlow's narrative, has been analyzed as having its own interpretation and opinion on the facts in regards to Jim and his actions. Even though it does not seem to me very clear, as there are no explicit judgments such as there are in Marlow's narrative on Jim and his actions, it is true that as any narrator's account emphasis on some aspects instead of others and some modulation of tone should bring us some light to several preferences or effects or outstanding points in the novel (though I would hardly call them "opinions" of the narrator).

important study of Conrad's narrative method in general and of this complex narrative voice, in particular. For the purpose of my argument I shall unfortunately omit many of his nuanced observations on the subject and just briefly describe the first two functions. I would like to note first of all the complex nature of the frame narrator in terms of distance from Jim. Its very intimate tone in the opening sentences, reinforced by its use of the personal pronoun "you," and its very peculiar focus on features that produce subjective impressions, such as its underscoring of Jim's voice, establishes a close yet external perspective of Jim. The narrator further adopts what seems to be a more omniscient perspective of the story, in reporting Jim's thoughts and in jumping from internal to external focalization. However, towards the end of its discourse, the frame narrator narrows its perspective to Jim's when narrating crucial episodes, such as that of the Inquiry. This episode is rendered to the reader through Jim's feelings and words—ignoring the general situation—to create suspense and to provide a contrast to Marlow's narrative. By means of this movement in narrative distance the frame narrator's flexibility demonstrates the knowledge that endows him with authority over the story.

Basically, the narrator tells most of the important elements of the story, but does so in a brief, sometimes elusive form that would tell everything and nothing at the same time, letting the reader surmise who the main character is; his origin; the nature of his short career as a sailor, and his most important experiences prior to the *Patna* incident that would make sense to keep in mind from the point of view of the rest of the story; that there is something hidden and embarrassing that Jim is trying to escape; and that there is a person who seems to understand him who shall tell his story many times. Its strategy in the telling of these elements of the story seeks to create suspense, since the real problematic remains concealed and is transferred to Marlow's narrative.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> A relevant example of suspense is found when the frame narrator gives its account of the Inquiry and, getting to the crucial question, skips it to report only Jim's answer: "He was coming to that, he was coming to that—and now, checked brutally, he had to answer by yes or no. He answered truthfully by a curt 'Yes, I did'" (23). This is made coherent in the narration by adopting in the narration of the Inquiry the above observed Jim's perspective and not reporting everything to the reader. The narrator gives the crucial and true response of Jim to whether he had jumped from the *Patna* leaving all the pilgrims asleep on board, so that the reader would know the

With regards to the second function mentioned above, the frame narrator works to introduce Marlow's oral narrative, while pointing out Marlow's willingness to tell Jim's story many times: "later on, many times, in distant parts of the world, Marlow showed himself willing to remember Jim, to remember him at length, in detail and audibly" (24).<sup>72</sup> In the last paragraph, it moves to a clear but unspecified time when Marlow will begin his narration, one of these multiple times he repeats the story.<sup>73</sup> We are rendered only one. Thus, the frame narrator's introduction of Marlow's narrative alerts the reader to the sea master's fragile narrative, and the reader's own inability to access other versions of the story. Finally, the narrator will frame the end of Marlow's oral narrative, and open a new narrative situation by introducing the privileged man's reading of Marlow's written ending of the story, in a repetitive movement that Jakob Lothe has analysed as a device that both shapes the narrative development and acts as a reminder of the narrative doubt—a movement of advance and retreat that, in fact, permeates the whole novel in its multiple layers, as we shall see.<sup>74</sup>

Nevertheless, the frame narrator's function of providing a contrast to Marlow's narrative is most remarkable at this point, and the least explored. The frame narrator pays attention to several episodes and provides a different perspective of Jim that the one rendered by Marlow. This brief alternative telling of the story emphasises the same aspects Marlow will point out, and thus reminds the reader what the important questions are and where Marlow's narrative might be doubted. The two main questions underscored are: Jim's moral and professional ambivalence when comparing his appearance with his actions; and the racial aspect of the story that points at collective identities. Both of these aspects of Jim's story anticipate the secret at

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answer but ignore what the question was about. Therefore, suspense in the story leads to Marlow's narrative.

<sup>72</sup> About the smoothness of narrative transitions to the three parts the author distinguishes, see Lothe's intelligent analysis of them in *Conrad's*.

<sup>73</sup> Miller notes that "Each enactment of a given episode echoes backward and forward indefinitely, creating a pattern of eddying repetition. If there are narrators within narrators there are also times within times—time-shifts, breaks in time, anticipations, retrogressions, retellings, and reminders that a given part of the story has often been told before" (34).

<sup>74</sup> See Jakob Lothe, "Repetition in Conrad's *Lord Jim*." *L'Époque Conradienne*. Numéro spécial: *Lord Jim* 30 (2004): 97-106. See also how he suggestively reads distance in the novel as a way to going from what is an individual problem to what is rendered as a collective problem to the community of listeners ("Conradian narrative" 166).

its heart, which shall structure Marlow's telling, by already demonstrating that the secret refers at once to Jim's identity as an individual as well as to his "racial" identity.

The contrast between the accounts of these two narrators reveals Marlow's problematic reliability. Their discordance unfolds Marlow's biased perspective of the story, which makes the reader feel he does not ring true or he does not provide alternative interpretations about a secret nobody really knows. This does not mean that the novel as a whole rejects Marlow's narrative, but rather that it encourages the audience to question Marlow's credibility. As it is developed below, this narrative strategy in *Lord Jim* is worked out by sourcing to multiple narrative voices.<sup>75</sup> The most relevant one is, by far, the frame narrator of the story, whose alternative perspective of Jim's intentions, the latter's image of himself, and incoherent actions, contrasts with Marlow's narrative. Irony, and a different selection of episodes from that made by Marlow are the narrative devices that shall uncover a real alternative point of view on Jim.

Irony discloses Jim's duplicity, or eventual hypocrisy: what Jim's fancies himself to be is not consistent with what he ultimately does. Several instances in the narrative possess this powerful effect. In regards to Jim, the narrator focuses on his voice and describes him physically, giving an impression that seems congruous with Marlow's feeling about it. Afterwards, however, he introduces some ironic notes that establish a distance toward the character, when he describes the water-clerk job: "To the captain he is faithful like a friend, attentive like a son, with the patience of Job, the unselfish devotion of a woman, and the jollity of a bon companion. *Later on the bill is sent in. It is a beautiful and humane occupation*" [7, emphasis added]. Thus, he had a very rewarding profession that allowed a very familiar and what

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<sup>75</sup> Ansgar Nünning mentions this strategy to indicate to the reader a narrator's unreliability: "Other inconsistencies may become apparent from multiperspectival accounts of the same event. The juxtaposition of two or more narrators affords the reader more information and enables him to make his own evaluations of the characters and to draw his own conclusions about the events." ("But why *will* you say that I am mad? On the Theory, History, and Signals of Unreliable Narration in British Fiction." *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik (AAA)* 22.1, 1997, 97.) From our point of view, this strategy does not only help the detection of unreliability but it works to nuance the various possibilities in addressing the problem of reliability, including unreliable narration. As we see, it works in *Lord Jim* to emphasize persuasion.

appears to be an accommodating relationship—though it is like that precisely because one is paid for it. Such a pragmatic outlook sheds some light upon Jim’s way of acting: vehemently pleading for pity, but ultimately quite practical. The idea suggested by this irony is repeated afterwards when the narrator mentions Jim’s practical reasons for hiding his real name: “To the white men in the waterside business and to the captains of ships he was just Jim—nothing more. He had, of course, another name, but he was anxious that it should not be pronounced. His incognito, which had as many holes as a sieve, was not meant to hide a personality but a fact” (8). Jim’s ‘doubleness’ is reinforced by his dreams, overly affected by “a course of light holiday literature,” which are fully described by the narrator in a way that would make us understand clearly why Jim’s expectations or self-representation did not match reality, and which poses a very ironic contrast from the narrator’s perspective, for he already knows the outcome will be the exact opposite. The passage reads as follows:

He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through a surf with a line; or as a lonely castaway, barefooted and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of shellfish to stave off starvation. He confronted savages on tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men—always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book. (9)

Of course, this irony, as Albert Guerard suggests, is only grasped on a second reading and with the complete knowledge of the story, now shared with the narrator. All these subtle examples give the feeling that there is some kind of duplicity in Jim—not to use the stronger word “hypocrisy,” which might be somewhat harsh—something that is going to condition the reading of Marlow’s Jim.

Furthermore, the narrator ironically reports Jim’s thoughts when he distinguishes between two kinds of seamen. Jim associates himself with the second kind, which is obviously ironic—from a second reading, of course—because, although Jim apparently seemed to belong to this group, his deed would place him in the realm of the outcasts of the first kind:

These were of two kinds. Some, very few and seen there but seldom, led mysterious lives, had preserved an undefaced energy with the

temper of buccaneers and the eyes of dreamers. They appeared to live in a crazy maze of plans, hopes, dangers, enterprises, ahead of civilisation, in the dark places of the sea; and their death was the only event in their fantastic existence that seemed to have a reasonable certitude of achievement. The majority were men who, like himself, thrown there by some accident, had remained as officers of country ships. They had now a horror of the home service, with its harder conditions, severer view of duty, and the hazard of stormy oceans. They were attuned to the eternal peace of Eastern sky and sea. They loved short passages good deck-chains, large native crews, and the distinction of being white. (13)

Along with irony, another narrative technique used to provide a contrast to Marlow's narrative is selection and perspective in episodes. To this effect, for instance, the narrator describes one episode that Marlow never refers to, and which prefigures the desertion of the *Patna*. In this episode, a cutter has run aground and Jim is asked to "keep stroke" of the boat, which Jim fails to do. That failing moves the narrator to say that "[t]he tumult and the menace of wind and sea now appeared very contemptible to Jim, increasing the regret of his awe at their inefficient menace. Now he knew what to think of it. It seemed to him he cared nothing for the gale. He could affront greater perils. He would do so—better than anybody" (10). This passage brings two different elements to the reader. In the first place, the episode reveals that Jim has "voluntarily" refused (he just "cared nothing") to brave the gale and help the passengers, as duty and the moral code would require of him. This is clearly shown, through his innermost thoughts, not to be unintentional. This episode casts a shadow over Jim's behaviour and morality, which we shall further analyze. Secondly, the narrator once again turns to irony by distancing himself, when he reports Jim's belief that he would do better than anybody on the next occasion, immediately after informing the reader about his wrong behaviour, only a couple of pages prior to this—an irony that continues in the following paragraph. As Lothe suggests:

Critics of *Lord Jim* have not sufficiently stressed the *twofold* prolepsis detectable in the training-ship episode: not just adumbrating Jim's jump from the *Patna* by revealing it as a form of repetitive action, it provides the reader with a crucial piece of background information which makes him or her more sceptical about Jim's defensive explanation of the jump. And, as this information is not shared by Marlow, it also makes the reader more critical of Marlow's sympathies and of the motivation for his narrative undertaking. (139)

Jim's supposed capacity to confront great perils is next parodied in one of his first seafaring experiences, also not mentioned in Marlow's narration. The narrator explains how a storm made him sick, lamed, so that he had to be brought to the hospital once the ship docked at an Eastern port. In this episode, a comment on Imagination can be understood in the light of Jim's future pursuing of his dream: "and Imagination, the enemy of men, the father of all terrors, unstimulated, sinks to rest in the dullness of exhausted emotion" (12). Imagination, the great power that directs Jim's life, is portrayed as an "enemy of men" which prevents rational action and exhausts men. This serves as a contrast to Stein's vision of Imagination as a less objectionable human quality, and to the non-condemned imagination attributed to Jim by Marlow. This is, once again, an observation that distances the narrator from Jim's life and attitude.

Finally, the frame narrator strongly insists on the distinction between whiteness and darkness, and focuses extendedly on the pilgrims, thus establishing from the very beginning a contrast that will gradually point at racial difference as part of the moral debate generated within Jim's story, as we will see in detail in the next chapter. A closer look at Marlow's narrative will clarify the narrator's last function.

### **2. 3. Marlow's narration: a questioned storyteller**

Henry James' comment that Marlow's intrusion made it hard for the reader to "get hold of Kurtz" applies perfectly to Jim too. As a result of this effect, the reader is compelled to doubt Marlow's account of him. Not only is Jim's individual identity questioned, but also Jim's collective identity, that of an English gentleman and, by extension, of whiteness. It is precisely through the narrative strategy of persuasion that an alternative way of representing "race" is articulated in Joseph Conrad's novel, as we will see later.

From the point of view of narrative theory, there is a lack of terminology to describe voices such as that of Marlow, and that of Mr Compson in *Absalom, Absalom!* Using the terminology currently at our disposition, detailed textual analysis allows us to say that Marlow's account is that of a non-objective narrator, somewhere in between what Greta Olson has labelled a "fallible narrator" and an "untrustworthy narrator," and in some sense what Dorrit Cohn has

described as a “discordant narrator.” The problem that Marlow and Mr Compson’s voices raise has to do with the clear opposition between “reliable” and “unreliable” narration established by narrative theory mentioned above. If *Lord Jim*’s Marlow had even deserved Jean-Paul Sartre’s perception of him as “a fallible being” who “utters it [the word] hesitatingly,”<sup>76</sup> it is hardly surprising that notable critics of narrative unreliability such as Dorrit Cohn, James Phelan, and Greta Olson have used him as an example or devoted entire articles to Marlow. But they have definitely not come to an agreement about him.<sup>77</sup> Their analyses pivot around the idea of unreliability, whether they consider that he is always “fallible” (Olson), shows “instances of unreliability” (Phelan) or can be distinguished as a “discordant narrator” (Cohn). Yet, their disagreements are noteworthy, since they position Marlow on different sides of the already established dichotomy between reliability and unreliability, which these critics understand as flexible and often problematic. I agree with many of the features these critics describe in the functioning of Marlow’s voice, but I believe that their disagreement would be resolved if we refocus the analysis of narrative reliability in the terms that I propose in this study. That is, if we do not consider fallibility, discordance, and unreliability as just opposed to reliability but as factors that shape the problem of reliability itself, and which can depict a wide range of modulations in narrative credibility. These factors involve the problems of narrative distance, narrative authority, the problems of epistemology and linguistic communicability, and are enacted in the narrative primarily by means of devices such as strategies of persuasion, narrative enigmas, irony, and narrative levels—which construct narrative voice.

From my point of view, therefore, Conrad explores the problem of reliability and delights in its nuances, yet without resorting to the construction of unreliable narrators in the Marlowian narratives. *Lord Jim* effectively questions the reliability of Marlow but does not fully

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<sup>76</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literary Essays*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1957, 14-5.

<sup>77</sup> See Dorrit Cohn, “Discordant Narration.” *Style* 34.2 (Summer 2000): 307-316; James Phelan’s dramatized appendix to *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2005) published as article before, “Charlie Marlow, narrative theorist, discourses on ‘youth.’” *College of English* 59.5 (1997): 569-75; and “‘I affirm nothing’. *Lord Jim* and the Uses of Textual Recalcitrance.” *Joseph Conrad: Voice, Sequence, History, Genre*. Ed. Jakob Lothe, Jeremy Hawthorn, and James Phelan. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2008. 41-59; Greta Olson, “Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators.” *Narrative* 11.1 (January 2003): 93-109.

reject his account, thus placing his narrative authority in a very ambivalent position, at the threshold of unreliability, at the very most. Marlow's voice clearly engages in an intense process of narrative persuasion that sometimes makes him resemble an unreliable narrator, but his sincerity in his will to discover, and his perseverance in a doubt which he would never be able to resolve, show that he retains respect for the Truth of the story.<sup>78</sup>

I will utilize the existing categories for describing the problem of reliability as presented in narrative voice as far as they are useful to clarify my points. They shall help me apprehend the ways in which Marlow's account asks not to be fully relied on, from which we shall understand how it articulates ambivalence in narrative and, afterwards, in the representation of "race." Marlow has a limited perspective and knowledge due to his presence in the story as a character and witness of Jim's life. He has neither the advantage of the omniscient narrator's knowledge, nor the latter's privileged access to Jim's mind. This fits the category labelled rather simply by Olson—though usefully enough for our purposes—as "fallible narrators," thus designating what Wayne Booth had already described decades before in his seminal work *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Just as a reminder, according to this critic, "fallible narrators do not reliably report on narrative events because they are mistaken about their judgments or perceptions or are biased. Fallible narrators' perceptions can be impaired because they are children with limited education or experience, as in *Huckleberry Finn*; or, as in the case of Marlow from *Lord Jim*, their reports can seem insufficient because their sources of information are biased and incomplete" (101).

"Fallible narrators" differ from what the critic labels "untrustworthy narrators" for "the inconsistencies these [latter] narrators demonstrate appear to be caused by ingrained behavioral traits or some current self-interest," they are *dispositionally* unreliable (102). What happens

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<sup>78</sup> I will use the concepts as formulated by narrative theory on reliable/unreliable narration. It is worth mentioning, though, Cedric Watts' concept of Janiform novel and covert plot as addressing a kind of narrative duplicity or ambivalence that resembles the terms upon which the discussion on reliability is based, although it refracts to other layers of the narration that focus moral or historical aspects. See Cedric Watts' *The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots*. Sussex and New Jersey: The Harvester Press and Barnes & Noble Books, 1984. His perspective of *Heart of Darkness* finds many points in common with my analysis of *Lord Jim* in the twofold character of Jim.

with Marlow is far too complex, though, to be classified simply as a “fallible narrator,”<sup>79</sup> as Cohn and Phelan’s analyses show, because he has limited knowledge which makes him a fallible narrator, on the one hand, but at the same time, his storytelling aims at Jim’s exoneration and adherence to the norms of a non-specified community referred to as “one of us.” This clear purpose brings his narrative very close to untrustworthy narration, as the events themselves are selected and told in a way that leads to this predetermined goal. That would be evident through Marlow’s use of time, for example, or his selection of events. Yet this tendency shall be demonstrated not only by these technical devices, but also Marlow’s participation in existing contemporary ideological frameworks, which, as noted by Cohn, drive Marlow to judgments the credibility of which is questioned by the novel. It is precisely and only in that confluence of narrative textuality and historical context where we shall find the ambivalence of Marlow’s voice. For the moment, and due to the broad nature of my approach, I shall return here to the analysis of narrative technique.

Since the aforementioned classification within narrative concepts is confusing and overlapping at certain points, I will refer most frequently to Marlow’s process of persuasion as a much wider but at the same time, I hope, much clearer description of his telling. “Persuasion” is simply understood in the sense described by C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon: “that one of the major types of composition whose purpose is to convince others of the wisdom of a certain line of action.” Thus “persuasion” in fiction is for us a narrative effort to convince through the effective use of language.<sup>80</sup> Both in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* persuasion arises from the fact that there is a secret in the story, which—because it is hidden from the narrators as well—appears as a narrative enigma the narrators are

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<sup>79</sup> Olson justifies Marlow’s “fallibility” to build her opposition to untrustworthy narrators in the following terms: “In *Lord Jim*, Gentleman Brown (who hates Jim and contributed to his death), and Jim’s traumatized lover Jewel to piece together the story of how Jim died. Again Marlow’s incomplete narration of the Patusan episode appears to be caused by the circumstance that he was not with Jim at the time of his death rather than by any internal motivation to conceal narrative events from the reader. The reader senses that Marlow’s perceptions are convincing in themselves, even though his mental inclusion of Jim as ‘one of us’ and his disappointment at Jim’s having abandoned the sinking *Patna* certainly color the quality of his storytelling” (103).

<sup>80</sup> It is remarkable how few dictionaries of literary terms include “persuasion.” For that definition see C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*. New York and London: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1992, 353.

trying to solve. Given the lack of sufficient information, the narrators source to persuasion in order to construct a convincing reading of the story. The key difference with “unreliable narration” is that their aim of persuading the reader of a personal reading of the story does not impede these narrators from acknowledging the fact that there is a persistent doubt, which renders their account a personal one rather than a pretended Truth. It is for these reasons that applying the concepts already at hand would undervalue Conrad’s complex approach to the problem of reliability.

Marlow’s persuasion involves judgment as the main procedure for directing his narrative. He presents Jim as he sees him, which is fair, because he has his own non-transferable personal opinion; however, there are some constituents in the novel—several of them pointed out more than fifty years ago by Albert Guerard—which function as warnings that Marlow’s judgment might not be appropriate to Jim’s story. This discordance between what the novel as a whole seems to reveal and the judgement of this particular narrative voice (in this case fully characterized), makes Cohn label this kind of narrator a “discordant narrator.” Again as a reminder, Cohn states that “discordant narration”: this term in addition to distinctively marking the divergence of this type from (factual) unreliability, intends to signify the possibility for the reader to experience a teller as normatively inappropriate for the story he or she tells. . . . It intimates as well that the narrator’s discourse, providing it with a meaning that, though not explicitly spelled out, is silently signalled to the reader behind the narrator’s back” (307). I take Cohn’s concept not so much as part of a strategy of constructing untrustworthiness, but rather as a device that measures the distancing movement between the text as a whole and Marlow as one of its narrators. Marlow’s discourse is discordant precisely because it is his relationship with the “fixed standard of conduct” that leads to his engagement with persuasion to be emphasized as out of keeping with the story he tells—as Cohn similarly argues later in relation to *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>81</sup> I will consider two inherent problems in Marlow’s narrative that render his a modern

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<sup>81</sup> Cohn argues that: “In the case of Marlow, the notion that colonialism is ‘an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to’ is belied by the fact that Kurtz, the prototypical colonialist, is chillingly degenerate: for he has, among other things, set *himself* up as a kind of deity to the African natives, having adorned his abode with a fence made of indigent skulls” (308).

and not fully reliable voice grounded in ambivalence: the first is limitation of knowledge and the problem of language; the second, the aim at persuasion.

a) The problem of knowledge and its narrative transmission

Marlow insists very much on the idea that knowledge of “life” is somehow unattainable to individuals, something that is constantly reiterated and exemplified by his complex, uncertain, dubious, blurred understanding of Jim. His own attempts to understand him never yield unequivocal results, which generates continuous expressions of angst that bring the problematics of unsatisfactory epistemology to the foreground of the narration. Deep preoccupation with the limits of epistemology is enforced by the multiple voices that penetrate into Marlow’s narrative, which, certainly, introduce new information and, no less importantly, new judgment to Jim’s story. In certain instances they contradict each other to offer a complex and unclear image of Jim and his life.

Arguably, this epistemological problem—which encompasses both the introduction of plural distinct judgments as well as new information—on the one hand, and the narrative discourse itself as a problematic vehicle for the expression of knowledge, on the other hand, become obstacles to the straightforwardness of the story. Indeed, they continuously impede its development, offering free rein to Marlow’s reflections in the present time of the narrative. A good deal of Marlow’s narration, both oral and written, is employed not only to elucidate Jim’s story but also to conduct an abstract, philosophical—and no less absorbing for all that—Modern reflection on the limits of human access to knowledge, a reflection that is also present in *Absalom, Absalom!* albeit to a more limited extent. Marlow’s expressed preoccupation should not be considered an obstacle in absolute terms; it is meaningful and has a real function beyond that of interrupting the story, since investigation into the limits of language, of individual perspective, and of knowledge is one, if not the principal, theme in *Lord Jim*, as we have already seen. Nevertheless, it cannot be disregarded that it has the paradoxical effect of hindering the telling of facts, characters, and other information indispensable to the reader for the understanding and creation of a personal view on the story.

Conrad addresses his concern about reliability by limiting the knowledge of his main narrator. Indeed, it is precisely the primal impossibility of knowing better which already introduces (in the form of a narrative enigma) an obstacle that erodes Marlow's reliability. In order to examine this idea with regards to limitation of knowledge, it should first be taken into account that Marlow participates in Jim's story: he is the latter's friend and counsellor, his patron when he is in trouble and in need of a solution that would save him from starvation. In Marlow Jim finds his opportunity to overcome the fact that not only "he cannot exonerate himself, but feels the impossibility of voicing his story within the excessively narrow limits for discourse set by the Board of Inquiry."<sup>82</sup> In the course of a dinner following the Inquiry, Jim recounts to Marlow the story of the *Patna*, detailing his feelings, emotions and attitudes more than the facts, in contrast to what he was required to relate during the Inquiry where he was judged for deserting it. Several meetings allow Marlow to follow Jim's story as told and experienced by himself, due to the fact that he supplies jobs and contacts to him, trying to help a tormented man who is hoping for a chance to redeem his immoral behavior aboard the sinking ship. Marlow's knowledge of Jim comes from three direct sources: one is his personal experience of him on every occasion they meet, the other one is Jim's own telling of his life, and a third one is what others say or narrate about him. This narrative situation results in a narration where, in the first place, that which comes from Marlow's testimony is dependent on his personality and judgment; what comes from Jim's words depends on Jim's evaluation of his own life and on his personal aims in the telling to Marlow; and, in what comes from others, other subjective perceptions.

Although they are friends, Marlow is not always able to understand this man. Sometimes he does not comprehend why he says something or acts in a certain way, and both Jim's actions and words may come as a surprise to him. His incomprehension of Jim, of which he is fully conscious, and especially those aspects that Marlow is most interested in—that is, his moral integrity—are expressed through anxious statements and warnings to the reader of a permanent, obsessive doubt and confusion about Jim's real personality, which would never be attainable. As he says in various ways, starting at the very beginning of the narrative: "It is when we try to grapple with another man's

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<sup>82</sup> Laverne Nishihara, "The Fetters of that Strange Freedom': Boundary as Regulating Technique in *Lord Jim*." *Conradiana* 28.1 (1996): 56.

intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun” (109) until the last time he sees Jim, when this doubt is still present, “I cannot say I had ever seen him distinctly—not even to this day, after I had my last view of him; but it seemed to me that the less I understood the more I was bound to him in the name of that doubt which is the inseparable part of our knowledge” (134). In this final view from the boat taking Marlow back to “the world,” he affirms: “For me that white figure in the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a vast enigma” (199).<sup>83</sup> After several years, Marlow has been able to realize something: that it was impossible for him to understand Jim or to be sure whether he had the right conception of him. Here is the very core of the secret about Jim, which is expressed in Marlow’s doubt about him. Skepticism is particularly relevant in the first part of the novel, as Mark A. Wollaeger has argued, because the novel is driven by Marlow’s persuasion that Jim can be redeemed and the doubt partly suppressed.<sup>84</sup>

Marlow’s inability to access real knowledge about Jim thoroughly conditions the narration of Jim’s story, because he would only be able to tell the Jim he has seen and tried to understand, seen thus from an explicitly flawed perspective. As Marlow himself reminds the audience—Marlow’s listeners after that particular dinner—would not know any other version of this story, would not know any other Jim: “He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you. I’ve led him out by the hand; I have pared him before you” (136). So, the audience’s information is second hand in regards to Jim and his world: “I can’t explain to you who haven’t seen him and who hear his word only at second hand the mixed nature of my feelings” (59). This enters the problem of discourse: information is incomplete because the speaker’s knowledge is limited, so the perspective received by the audience is, necessarily, incomplete and probably for that limitation, misleading. This is what makes Marlow a fallible narrator,

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<sup>83</sup> Some other examples show Marlow’s insistence on this: “He was not—if I may say so—clear to me. He was not clear” (107), or “I could never make up my mind about was whether his line of conduct amounted to shrinking his ghost or to facing him out” (119) or “I am fated never to see him clearly” (146).

<sup>84</sup> Mark A. Wollaeger, *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Skepticism*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990.

and himself aware of and honest about his non-omniscient perspective.<sup>85</sup>

Language is therefore unable to express the “hidden truth,” as J. M. Rawa notes in reference to *Heart of Darkness* yet which is surely applicable to *Lord Jim* too: “Conrad’s Marlow uses inconclusive language (frequently ruptured by silence or obscurity) because ‘the inner truth is hidden’ (*HD* 103). Yeats observes that ‘man can embody truth but he cannot know it’ and we see that Marlow does not know completely—even at the close of the novel. Thus identity and language are not fixed in *Heart of Darkness*.”<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, it is not only that language cannot express withheld secrets, but also that language itself constitutes a faulty instrument for bridging that *différance*.

In *Lord Jim* we find the question posed by Michael Wood in regards to the relationship between literature and knowledge. Wood, like Marlow, wonders “‘How is it possible to *see* an object according to an *interpretation*?’ Literature doesn’t answer this question, but it does enact the riddle constantly, offering what seem to be direct perceptions intricately entwined with often elaborate interpretations.”<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, discourse itself is considered patently inadequate to transmit all the information that human contact, impressions, and feelings are capable of perceiving. This conception of language in relation to silence and the ineffability of reality was a major concern

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<sup>85</sup> Many examples demonstrate Marlow’s insistence upon the idea that he does not mean to be, and cannot be omniscient: “Brierly went off in a huff. At the time his state of mind was more of a mystery to me than it is now” (45) or such phrases like “I wanted to know—and to this day I don’t know, I can only guess” (51), and “As to what sensations he experienced when he got ashore and heard the unforeseen conclusion of a tale in which he had taken such a pitiful part, he told me nothing of them, and it is difficult to imagine” (53); “What were the various ends their destiny provided for the pilgrims I am unable to say” (84); “I don’t know how much Jim understood; but I know he felt, he felt confusedly but powerfully, the demand of some such truth or some such illusion—I don’t care how you call it” (135).

<sup>86</sup> J. M. Rawa, *The Imperial Quest and Modern Memory from Conrad to Greene*. New York and London: Routledge, 2005, 51.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Wood, *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005, 6. Here we might recall Conrad’s evocation of the sight as an effect literature seems to be able to convey through words in his preface to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*: “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*!” (Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus.’* Ed. Robert Kimbrough. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978, 147.)

for Victorians and their French contemporaries in the late nineteenth-century, as Martin Ray explains in detail, and one shared by Conrad who was able to draw upon both literary and philosophic traditions. Ray notes how this preoccupation works in *Heart of Darkness*:

It is possible to suggest, for instance, that the dilemma of *Heart of Darkness* is Marlow's conflict between a wish to communicate to his audience (in order to control or exorcize his experiences) and a knowledge that successful communication entails the annihilation of that language by which he seeks to support or re-establish a stable vision of reality. He must maintain language while acknowledging that communication demands its extinction. Words must not remain merely words but must give way to the things they denote. The very act of narration, therefore, may be a kind of self-immolation, committing oneself to a medium which one knows will expire.<sup>88</sup>

This is definitely also valid for *Lord Jim*, as well as for other Conrad novels such as *Under Western Eyes*. As a matter of fact, as Edward Said argues, this feature of Conrad's "utterance is the *form* of the negation" which characterizes all his work.<sup>89</sup> Marlow feels that because of trying as he does "for the success of this yarn I am missing innumerable shades—they were so fine, so difficult to render in colourless words" (60). He pauses to remind us of this idea afterwards, giving an example of what kind of perception Marlow feels that language cannot express:

Immense! No doubt it was immense; the seal of success upon his words, the conquered ground for the soles of his feet, the blind trust of men, the belief in himself snatched from the fire, the solitude of his achievement. All this, as I've warned you, gets dwarfed in the telling. I can't with mere words convey to you the impression of his total and utter isolation. (163)

The inefficiency of language at certain points has the serious effect of leaving the reader without a detailed justification of some judgment which the reader is compelled to believe just because the narrative voice finds no words to explain his basis for it. This passage is a clear

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<sup>88</sup> Martin Ray, "Language and Silence in the Novels of Joseph Conrad." *Conradiana* 16.1 (1984): 23. See also on this Charles Eric Reeves, "A Voice of Unrest: Conrad's Rhetoric of the Unspeakable." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 27.3 (Fall 1985): 284-310.

<sup>89</sup> Edward W. Said, "Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 7:2 (Winter 1974): 131. Reprinted in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983.

example of how Marlow induces the reader to believe in the immensity of Jim's achievement in Patusan. Thus, language is twofold. It is the only means through which Marlow can perpetuate Jim's memory and—as the narrative itself indicates—reality, and existence itself. But it is also a flawed vehicle, for there are elements that might be crucial and which rest on a shadow because language seems unable to represent them exactly as they are in reality. Therefore, there exists an insurmountable gap between language and reality, though language happens to be the only means to perpetuate reality in the passage of time.<sup>90</sup>

Marlow puts the linguistic nature of the telling firmly in the foreground of the narration to make sure that his audience is positively aware of his telling. Orality contributes greatly to this effect, since Marlow needs to preserve the phatic function of language in the communication with his audience.<sup>91</sup> This keeping the reader aware can be seen in discourse markers like these: "I can easily picture him to myself in the peopled gloom of the cavernous place... I can see him glaring" (54); "I won't say anything about innocence" (106). There are also multiple indications of reported speech such as "He confessed that..." or "He told me that..." (54), which defies any suggestion of a camera eye vision of the story and the main character. Awareness of the telling is reinforced in the narrative with scattered and brief

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<sup>90</sup> There is a still further consideration about the prominent role of language in *Lord Jim* pointed out by Jeremy Hawthorn. The author suggests the paradoxical power of language, the use of which in Conrad will be fully demonstrated in its absorbing of imperial discourse: "I suggested in my previous chapter that a use—or misuse—of the power of language to escape from the here and now while maintaining a controlling influence over it through complex chains of mediation, was radically involved in the operation of imperialism. *Lord Jim* seems to me to extend this analysis of the relationship and analogies between indirect political control and that indirect power over facts provided by language. And in *Lord Jim*, I think, Conrad starts to ask more direct questions about the particular usage of words that is fiction, about the extent to which the reading of fiction is a means of achieving knowledge of and control over reality—or escaping from it" (*Joseph Conrad: Language and Fictional Self-Consciousness*. London: Edward Arnold, 1979, 38.)

<sup>91</sup> For an analysis of the oral features of discourse in Joseph Conrad's work, especially in *Heart of Darkness*, see Michael A. Lucas' chapter "Voices in Narration and Conversation" in his *Aspects of Conrad's Literary Language*. Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives series. Boulder: Social Science Monographs; Lublin: Maria Curie-Sklodowska University, 2000. Gerard Barrett points out the several metaphors that allude to writing as also a fragile means of communication in "The Ghost of Doubt: Writing, Speech and Language in *Lord Jim*." *Master Narratives: Tellers and telling in the English novel*. Ed. Richard Gravil. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002. 159-168.

interlocutions of dialogue usually used to ask for approval, to compel the audience, or to interchange impressions. And yet, the marks of dialogue are unidirectional: Marlow addressing his audience. He addresses his audience by saying “If you fellows will concede to me that each of us has a familiar devil as well” (25) or frequently in sentences such as, or similar to “You may call it an unhealthy curiosity if you like” (34) or “You must remember he believed... (55). There seems to be only one sentence of dialogue that interrupts Marlow’s narrative, just to make a very brief comment: “You are subtle, Marlow” (60). This virtual suppression of the dialogic participation in the telling, as Bette London remarks, in fact “transforms collegial conversation into controlling monologue.”<sup>92</sup> Therefore if, on the one hand, the telling and hearing are the most “sensory activity” that would approach the goal of making the audience “see” (Said 119),<sup>93</sup> thus reinforcing the “materiality of language” that Frederic Jameson sees as Conrad’s innovation in ‘point of view’;<sup>94</sup> “on the other hand, the essential story itself seems opposite to the conditions of its telling,” as Said suggests (118). In other words, although Marlow’s appeals to the audience involve them in the narrative, allow them to

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<sup>92</sup> Bette London, *The Appropriated Voice: Narrative Authority in Conrad, Forster, and Woolf*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1990, 30. This book adopts a close perspective of analysis to ours. However, her understanding of voice and narrative authority, though very anchored in narrative, is supported by the social authority of the discourses. I will refer to this authority later as referred to the discourse of the late Victorian British Imperialism and to the discourse of the Southern myth, yet here by “narrative authority” I refer exclusively to the definition provided above. Likewise, Susan Sniader Lanser’s excellent *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1992) has focused attention on the underestimated principle of narrative authority in relation to the construction of narrative voice. Her approach, like London’s, is more expansive as well, since she understands that “Discursive authority—by which I mean here the intellectual credibility, ideological validity, and aesthetic value claimed by or conferred upon a work, author, narrator, character, or textual practice—is produced interactively; it must therefore be characterized with respect to specific receiving communities. . . . One major constituent of narrative authority, therefore, is the extent to which a narrator’s status conforms to this dominant social power. At the same time, narrative authority is also constituted through (historically changing) textual strategies that even socially unauthorized writers can appropriate” (6).

<sup>93</sup> Adam Zachary Newton explains the importance of “sight” as a way to “appropriate” in *Lord Jim* and parallels it to the way “language fixes and holds fast, narrative discourse doing so in its own distinctive ways.” (“We Die in a Last Word: Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*.” *Narrative Ethics*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995, 76.)

<sup>94</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Art*. 1981. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005, 217.

participate and to identify with the community implied in the phrase “one of us”—they also function as reminders of the strongly characterized narrative voice, indicating mediation.<sup>95</sup>

Even though there is no reported interlocution during Marlow’s oral narrative, some of it is indicated to be just omitted, as illustrated by the opinion of the privileged man reported in the letter Marlow writes him (201). Besides, the entire story is transmitted from various conversations that Marlow has with many people, including, of course, Jim. In the collected and reported conversations that comprise Marlow’s oral narrative presented to the reader, he is himself a very active interlocutor, who notices, questions, objects, and makes insightful observations. Within those internal conversations we actually find real dialogue, which has the clear function of allowing Marlow to comment upon other voices, and also to let the audience know the nature of his temperament and feelings. The sequence of several conversations gives the narrative a deep dialogic texture (“dialogic” in the sense of polyphony noted by Bakhtin, but also in the plain sense of “with the character of dialogue”).<sup>96</sup> There is hardly any narration of facts that is not framed into another narrative level, that of a conversation with Jim over dinner, or with Jewel in Patusan, with the French Lieutenant, with Stein, or with Gentleman Brown. So this creates an atmosphere of talking, of telling, of constant dialoguing in which, I contend, the story remains “clouded,” “blurred.” A similar effect, also produced by foregrounding language, discourse, narration, is present in the novel *Absalom, Absalom!* We will pay more attention to the oral tradition within which Marlow tells the story in the next chapter.

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<sup>95</sup> A very interesting study on the ways the narrator’s personality is constructed in narrative texts and how it relates to unreliable voices—and I would add, voices of persuasion—is Uri Margolin’s “The Doer and the Deed: Action as a Basis for Characterization in Narrative.” *Poetics Today* 7.2 (1986): 205-225.

<sup>96</sup> For an interpretation on the dialogical nature of *Lord Jim* especially in regards to the ending of the novel, yet very critical of Bakhtin’s ideas, see Cedric Watts, “Bakhtin’s monologisms and the endings of *Crime and punishment* and *Lord Jim*.” *Lord Jim: Centennial Essays*. Ed. Allan H. Simmons and J. H. Stape. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000, 15-30; see also, in relation to other works, including references to *Lord Jim*, James Guimond and Katherine Kearney Maynard, “Polyphony in the Jungle: A Bakhtinian Analysis of ‘Heart of Darkness’ and Related Works.” *Conrad at the Millennium: Modernism, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism*. Ed. Gail Fincham and Attie De Lange. Boulder: Social Science Monographs; Lublin Maria Curie-Skłodowska, 2001. 321-344. We will recall Bakhtin’s idea of “polyphony” in chapter 4.

In his concern about the limits of linguistic expression in the telling of a story that is “historical” (I mean, that has happened in the “reality” of the fiction), Marlow comments several times on the very creation of the story, on the diverse components that he needs to organize in order to tell the story, and the problems of its reception. He says, for example, “All this happened in much less time than it takes to tell, since I am trying to interpret for you into slow speech the instantaneous effect of visual impressions” (33); and “Of course the recollection of my last conversation with Brierly is tinged with the knowledge of his end that followed so close upon it” (43); or, finally, “From the way he narrated that part I was at liberty to infer he was partly stunned by the discovery he had made” (53).<sup>97</sup>

In the first of the above quotations Marlow considers how the time of discourse does not correspond to time in the story and that it is a device that may be used in order to achieve an optimum effect on the story. Marlow’s consciousness of it should be borne in mind, because in actuality it works as an indication, especially in the crucial episode of the jump, of the manipulation of the story in order to mount a defense of Jim. Marlow’s claim for method in itself mirrors Conrad’s own in the eyes of Henry James, illustrating his working of voices as water ripples, each introducing the next one. His claim of linguistic artifice itself appears as a Modern concern that developed in the

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<sup>97</sup> Amongst the impressive amount of examples focusing on narrative construction, I can add the following: “The only thing that at this distance of time strikes me as miraculous is the extent of my imbecility” (35); “The marital relations of seamen would make an interesting subject, and I could tell you instances... However, this is not the place, nor the time, and we are concerned with Jim—who was unmarried” (95); “It may be I was belittling him by such a fear. How could I tell?... I am telling you so much about my own instinctive feelings and bemused reflections because there remains so little to be told of him.” (136); “I suppose you think it is a story that you can imagine for yourselves. We have heard so many such stories, and the majority of us don’t believe them to be stories of opportunities: episodes of passing at best, or perhaps only of youth and temptation, doomed to forgetfulness in the end, even if they pass through the reality of tenderness and regret. This view mostly is right, and perhaps in this case too . . . . Yet I don’t know. To tell this story is by no means so easy as it should be—were the ordinary standpoint adequate. Apparently it is a story very much like the others: for me, however, there is visible in its background the melancholy figure of a woman, the shadow of a cruel wisdom buried in a lonely grave, looking on wistfully, helplessly, with sealed lips” (165); “Remember this is a love story I am telling you now” (177); “This, let me remind you again, is a love story; you can see it by the imbecility, not a repulsive imbecility, the exalted imbecility of these proceedings, this station in torchlight, as if they had come there on purpose to have it out for the edification of concealed murders” (178).

history of twentieth century literature. Yet it has the effect of obstructing the already serpentine approach to the narrative enigma that encloses the secret. Thus, the irruption of metafiction and the problematics of linguistic communication in a world where comprehension is so far out of anyone's reach, work to make Marlow's dubious and limited point of view congruent with his conception of life and epistemology. This functions in a very similar way in William Faulkner's novels, where narrative voice is so subjected to individual minds and capabilities that truth is never regarded as attainable.

## b) Voices of persuasion: Marlow and Jim, the story of a friendship

Despite the general and overwhelming insistence on the inaccessibility of knowledge and truth, some modern narrative voices aim to get as close as possible to a "truth." Here a Modern contradiction stands out, as Suresh Raval notes in relation to *Lord Jim* by saying that "Marlow thus speaks in a double epistemological mode: one emphasized the inscrutable nature of Jim, whereas the other insists on Jim as 'one of us.'"<sup>98</sup> Certainly, Marlow so clearly points at the existence of a kind of truth imprisoned in the secret in *Lord Jim* that the strength of his conviction even solicits the reader to look for it.<sup>99</sup> This is because, in fact, without the goal of certain truth the very device of the narrative enigma would be ineffective. As Marlow insists, "I wanted to know—and to this day I don't know, I can only guess" (51.) Taking truth as a premise—although it ultimately proves unattainable—we can see the narrator's limitation of knowledge and the ineffability inherent in human language as eroding Marlow's narrative authority, an effect we will further explore in *Absalom, Absalom!* These limitations, indeed, diminish the power of the narrator to tell his story.

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<sup>98</sup> Suresh Raval, "Narrative and Authority in *Lord Jim*: Conrad's Art of Failure." *ELH* 48.2 (Summer 1981), 388. Tracy Seeley explores this apparent paradox defined as the combination of the heroic idealism and the doubt or the inaccessibility of knowledge to argue the Modernist nature of Conrad's *Lord Jim* in her article "Conrad's Modernist Romance: *Lord Jim*." *ELH* 59.2 (Summer 1992): 495-511.

<sup>99</sup> For a reflection on Truth from a philosophical point of view, see Cushing Strout, "The Truth is in the Retelling: 'A Nice Question' about *Lord Jim*." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 40.2 (Spring 2004): 209-212. See also Ross C. Murfin, who pursues the idea of Truth in his reading of the novel, *Lord Jim: After the Truth*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.

More specifically, Marlow's storytelling seems not to aim so much at truth as an absolute value, but rather as a reassuring thought to hold onto in a moment of discomforting uncertainty, which constitutes *his* truth. This is why Marlow's scepticism is, as Lothe observes, "to some extent balanced, or counteracted, by Marlow's insistent effort to understand Jim, and if possible to exonerate him" (148). The limitation of knowledge and awareness of the imprecision of language in the telling, indeed, do not impede certain aims in the narrative or certain reassuring perspectives. In fact, Marlow is so afraid of the possibility of Jim's wretchedness that his storytelling will subordinate itself to his wishes so as not to see the tottering stage collapse. He accepts the doubt and places its importance at the centre of the story, but his fear of alternative versions that might read the whole context in terms of a downfall (as Brierly notably does) engages him in the rhetoric of persuasion. In the search for a truth, Marlow's temporary retreat to the beliefs of "the fixed standard of conduct" of the late British Empire offers the illusion of a truth, which, nonetheless, his mixed experience of Jim shall ultimately fade into the mist that paradoxically reveals the convulsed truth underlying both the code and the individual. We can discern in Marlow here the critical tension Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan splendidly reads among Conrad's most intense preoccupations and in the shape of modern narrative versus mythical narrative that structures *Lord Jim*. Marlow's narratives, like Conrad's work, are "often, indeed, an open invitation to destruction, for he, too, has a share in the Nietzschean legacy which nurtures this form of critical discourse, and his writing is constantly engaged in a self-dismantling, self-subversive *mise en abyme*. But Conrad was, as we shall see, a thoroughly didactic artist, primarily concerned with ethical choices in open-eyed defiance of the modern temper and its corrosive relativization of all truths and values."<sup>100</sup> Marlow's engagement in persuasion, thus, is a struggle with truth that simultaneously departs from and approaches it, unlike unreliable narration, which pretends to state a truth belied by the novel as a whole.

Bearing in mind these complexities, emphatic persuasion shall be understood as the feature of discourse that would make Marlow's account questionable regardless of his authority as the main narrator who includes in his narration other people's pronouncements, and as the voice that closes the novel. Persuasion is an optimal mode of

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<sup>100</sup> Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1991, 6.

narration here precisely because there is a lack of information that allows a narrator to speculate and provide his version of the story, for which the reader has no defined alternative.

Certainly, although limitation of perspective and knowledge condition Marlow's narrative, he nevertheless does not tell the story only for the mere pleasure of telling it, but with an aim to persuade. He personally declares several motives for the telling, all of them converging upon the principal one: to justify Jim's morality so that he can be identified as "one of us."<sup>101</sup> Persuasion is the crucial constituent of the narrative in *Lord Jim*, yet it is worked with great subtlety. I shall gather the textual evidence from the narrative in order to demonstrate the extent to which Marlow's narrative intends to provide a clear defense of Jim.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Some articles and books are strictly devoted to the issue of morality in the novel from a non-technical point of view. See for example, George A. Panichas, "The Moral Sense in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*." *Humanitas* 13.1 (2000): 10-30; and Daniel Brudney's highly defensive, "Marlow's Morality" *Philosophy and literature* 27 (2003): 318-340; or Grazyna Branny's comparison on Conrad and Faulkner from this perspective, *A Conflict of Values: Alienation and Commitment in the Novels of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner*. Krakow: Wydawnictwo Spons, 1997. It is worth quoting here Bruce Henricksen's linking of morality and the colonialist discourse: "Although Marlow briefly entertains the opinion that Jim's struggle is ridiculous, he shares Jim's need to save from the fire the metastory of Western humanity's moral identity. An affirmation of this moral identity is crucial to the ideology of colonialism, and in this novel Marlow is more sympathetic to colonialism than he is in *Heart of Darkness*. But if Marlow's oppositional discourse in *Heart of Darkness* is haunted by its *official* other, Marlow's more hegemonic discourse in *Lord Jim*, so openly nostalgic for the values of home and the codes of British merchant Marine, is nonetheless haunted by *unofficial* stories." *Nomadic Voices. Conrad and the Subject of Narrative*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1992, 88. Thus, morality results also in the controversial, as R. A. Gekoski suggested, since "If *Lord Jim* is morally ambiguous, it is so because its subject is moral ambiguity. Marlow's understanding of his involvement with Jim, and what Jim represents, does not lead to any given moral truths, but rather indicates the lurking paradoxes that underlie *any* given moral stance" (*Conrad: The Moral World of the Novelist*. London: Paul Elek, 1978, 93).

<sup>102</sup> As Sanford Pinsker states: "But *Lord Jim* is, finally, no more Jim's story than "Heart of Darkness" was Kurtz's. It is Marlow who probes the moral landscape of *Lord Jim*, alternating between roles as prosecutor and counsel for the defense. If a leap of forward imagination made him Kurtz's secret sharer, Marlow reverses the psychological gears in his compulsion to exonerate an aspect of his own youthful romanticism. Granted, Tuan Jim attracts more than his fair share of "secret sharers"—including some, like Brierly, who commit suicide when the identification strikes home—but Marlow is the most empathetic listener and/or non-directed therapist of all." (*The Languages of Joseph Conrad*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1978, 49).

In fact, there are two processes of persuasion at work in *Lord Jim*: one is Marlow's; the other is Jim's, which is contained in Marlow's discourse. When Jim tells his story to Marlow, he is extremely persuasive. Marlow tries to maintain his detachment but finally succumbs. He ends up trusting Jim's self-defense, pitying him, and envisioning their relationship as virtually that of father and son. This has the tremendous effect—maybe even intended by Jim—of transmitting persuasion as the mode of telling of his own story, similar to Mr Compson's effect on Shreve's narration, yet with the difference that Shreve will go even further in *Absalom, Absalom!* than his predecessor. Jim's acknowledgment of his own moral weakness is in need of persuasive reassurance in order to make moral redemption possible; Marlow's awareness of Jim's doubtful morality is, in the same way, also in need of this rhetorical strategy to convince his audience. Hence, Marlow channels Jim's intention to persuade him, and Marlow in turn persuades the reader, who is commonly convinced on a first reading, as Guerard noticed half a century ago. Novalis' epigram to *Lord Jim* "It is certain my Conviction gains infinitely, the moment another soul will believe in it"—which Jakob Lothe has brilliantly analyzed in relation to the other genres in the novel—is indeed a condensation of *Lord Jim*.<sup>103</sup>

Attention should thus be paid to the desire to convince by means of the rhetoric of persuasion in the novel. I will trace Marlow's process of persuasion by exploring the features of his telling, Marlow's accommodating of the story to his chosen track, and finally Jim's attempts to persuade Marlow, which end up being integrated into Marlow's narrative. And so, I will tell the story of Marlow and Jim's friendship.<sup>104</sup>

A few motives appear in Marlow's narrative with regards to his interest in telling the story and beyond the mere pleasure of doing it

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<sup>103</sup> Jakob Lothe focuses on the epigram to explore its suggestiveness in relation to the features of polyphony and genre. ("Conrad's *Lord Jim*: Narrative and Genre." *Joseph Conrad: Voice, Sequence, History, Genre*. 236-253.)

<sup>104</sup> Bernard J. Paris' monograph on Marlow, *Conrad's Charlie Marlow: A New Approach to 'Heart of Darkness' and Lord Jim* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) traces the relationship between Marlow and Jim, yet from a very descriptive and personally interpretative point of view. See also, Charles J. McCann, "Lord Jim vs. the Darkness: the Saving Power of Human Involvement." *College English* 27.3 (December 1965): 240-243.

for its own sake. Beginning with a comment he makes fairly late in the novel, which is perhaps the most obvious at first reading, Marlow says:

all I had lately seen, all I had heard, and the very human speech itself, seemed to have passed away out of existence, living only for a while longer in my memory, as though I had been the last of mankind. . . . and I felt that when to-morrow I had left it for ever, it would slip out of existence, to live only in my memory till I myself passed into oblivion. I have that feeling about me now; perhaps it is that feeling which has incited me to tell you the story, to try to hand over to you, as it were, its very existence, its reality—the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion (192).

Marlow feels that life is passing, that knowledge is difficult to attain, and that the only way of making knowledge, or perception of truth, endure is by telling it, making a story of it. This feeling of just a memory that keeps the fire of life glowing in the individual mind is emphasized by the witnessing of Jim in Patusan, a timeless place uncertainly located with no possibility of transmission of truth to the outer world, the one that makes it possible to achieve fame. Thus, the experience of Patusan threatens Jim's story, personality and life, for his fate would be to die by not being remembered, which mirrors Jim's modern tragic destiny of complete isolation, as Dorothy Van Ghent argues.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, Marlow has the ancient motivation of storytelling as a way of perpetuating life and the reality of life as something that contains at once movement and truth. Not only this, but Jim's story has been, from Marlow's point of view, misunderstood, as Michael Greaney notes,

To a certain extent Marlow's emphasis on the widespread talk about Jim is another means of enlisting our sympathy for the hero: if Jim has been grossly misrepresented by the promiscuous gossip of the 'deck-chair sailors,' then it falls to Marlow's audience, or Conrad's reader, to reach a more sympathetic verdict on his case.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to the strong concern with memory, the transmission of stories through language and the difficulties involved in that, as well as

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<sup>105</sup> Dorothy Van Ghent, "On *Lord Jim*." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Lord Jim: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Robert E. Kuehn. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969, 71.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Greaney, *Conrad, Language, and Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002, 81.

the concern with the passage of time—all of which are major themes in this novel—there is another motive that appears earlier in Marlow’s narrative which is striking for its sincerity, given that it is presented as morally questionable:

Perhaps, unconsciously, I hoped to find that something, some profound and redeeming cause, some merciful explanation, some convincing shadow of an excuse. I see well enough now that I hoped for the impossible—for laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man’s creation, of the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death—the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct. . . . I positively hoped to obtain from that battered and shady invalid some exorcism against the ghost of doubt. (35)

Marlow’s “looking for an excuse” to exonerate Jim is possible because of his undermining of concrete facts in favour of general but essential aspects of human nature, such as feelings or intentions:

It’s a weakness of mine. . . . My weakness consists in not having a discriminating eye for the incidental—for the externals—... and in each case all I could see was merely the human being . . . Oh! It’s a failing; it’s a failing; and then comes a soft evening; a lot of men too indolent for whist—and a story (59).

This functions in the text as a warning about the point of view in the story, because it gives us a clue to understanding the origin of Marlow’s secret and why ultimately facts seem not to be as relevant as feelings about facts. It is clear, for example, that this is the sense Jim as well as Marlow had about the Inquiry. Told through what seem to be Jim’s thoughts reported in free indirect speech by the frame narrator, the members of the Inquiry “wanted facts. Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!” (22). This is also Marlow’s perspective, when he says that

Whether they know it or not, the interest that drew them there was purely psychological, —their expectation of some essential disclosure as to the strength, the power, the horror, of human emotions. Naturally nothing of the kind could be disclosed. . . . However, an official inquiry could not be any other thing. Its object was not the fundamental why, but the superficial how, of this affair. (38)

It is why Jim acts rather than what and how he does it, that matters. Marlow's story is perfectly in line with this belief. This is very evident throughout the novel, but especially in regards to the *Patna* episode and the subsequent experiences before going to Patusan, when facts—that is, Jim's actions—are revealingly not praiseworthy, which has very significant consequences, as we are going to see.<sup>107</sup>

In what has been labelled the second part of the novel, that concerning Patusan, there is a change in the nature of the narrative, for it does not introduce so many perspectives and is filled with what has been dismissively seen to be typical of the adventure novel. It seems to me that there is a misunderstanding of this new mode of narration, as I try to demonstrate in chapter 3. I just want to remark here that the second part of the novel is in perfect harmony with Marlow's persuading mode of narration developed in the first. The second setting of Jim's story, Patusan, is more action packed, though Marlow makes many comments to illustrate Jim's progress and relationship to the "natives" of Patusan. It participates in the latter's defence, because it is the only place where some exemplary action can be narrated about Jim. Action is more important in Marlow's oral narration of Patusan because it leads to apparent victory and success. It is used as a source of praise for Jim, a sort of redemption based on facts, not words, which, therefore, cannot be disapproved by Marlow's audience. Despite action being given a priority in this part, the psychological—aspect, not only what Jim thinks and feels but also Marlow—never loses its importance.

Indeed, and surprisingly enough for a suspicious reader, Marlow's motives in telling the story surface diaphanously in the narrative. Marlow is concerned with Jim, and the novel is about the relationship between Marlow and Jim only from Marlow's perspective. We do not know what Jim thinks about it, but we do know what Marlow thinks about Jim. Furthermore, by the end of the novel Jim can no longer respond since he is as dead, much like Charles Bon during the telling of *Absalom, Absalom!*

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<sup>107</sup> Muriel Moutet explores this distinction to discuss how much Schopenhauer influenced the notion of truth in Conrad's work and especially in *Lord Jim* in "Jim's Trial: Sympathy, or the New Voice of Conviction." *L'Époque Conradienne* 25 (1999): 67-86.

Taking into account Jim's great influence upon Marlow's telling, it is important to pay attention to Jim's motives for telling his own story. When talking to Marlow after the Inquiry, he reportedly declares his intention of finding somebody who would understand why he jumped: "It is all in being ready. I wasn't; not—not then. I don't want to excuse myself; but I would like to explain—I would like somebody to understand—somebody—one person at last! You! Why not you?" (52). Initially, Marlow does not accept not being ready as a valid reason to desert a sinking ship with 800 sleeping pilgrims on board.

We see that at the beginning of their friendship, Marlow distances himself from Jim's explanation of his story and thus portrays his feelings at the end of that conversation: "Upon the whole he was misleading. That's how I summed him up to myself after he left me late in the evening" (49). Marlow keeps his distance from Jim's narrating in that conversation through irony, as for example when Jim's says, "What a chance missed!" (53) and Marlow, after a digression in which he says he had realized Jim was an "imaginative beggar," comments: "If you had stuck to the ship, you mean!" (54). Of course, Marlow implies that it is not the fact of remaining on the ship that represents a missed chance for Jim, but rather not having performed a heroic action given this opportunity. Further along in the same conversation, Jim gets up, shakes his fist and sits down again, at which point Marlow says again: "A chance missed, eh?" Jim answers: "Why don't you laugh?" he said. 'A joke hatched in hell. Weak heart ... I wish sometimes mine had been.'" And Marlow: "This irritated me. 'Do you?' I exclaimed with deep-rooted irony" (68).<sup>108</sup> Paul Italia highlights the effects of irony in creating that distance, since irony "allows Marlow's concern for Jim to triumph over curiosity, to repel Jim's unyielding resistance to any view of the disaster other than his own, and to counter Jim's monody of self-pity with notes of realism." More specifically, irony serves the purpose of guiding moral judgment in a complex way: in addition to suggesting the issues worthy of moral inspection it also "intends to move Marlow's audience to temper judgment with compassion by exposing not only the 'tragic' possibilities inherent in the exercise of personal will, but also the

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<sup>108</sup> Another example can be found when Jim perversely says in order to distance himself from his own actions: "The thing stirred and jumped off like something alive while I was looking at it." And immediately, Marlow "observed casually": "That made you feel pretty bad," ironically (54).

rather conspicuously ‘funny’ effects of its patent contradictions and ensuing confusions.”<sup>109</sup>

At the beginning, Marlow’s intention is not to disappoint Jim, though he consciously maintains an ironic distance from his telling. He is very aware of Jim’s need for being trusted and Jim’s need to defend himself. For instance, when, at the very beginning of the telling, he tries to convince Marlow that he must not be associated with the rest of the white crew that jumped from the *Patna*, Marlow acknowledges that

He discovered at once a desire that I should not confound him with his partners in—in crime, let us call it. He was not one of them; he was altogether of another sort. I gave no sign of dissent. I had no intention, for the sake of barren truth, to rob him of the smallest particle of any saving grace that would come in his way. (51)

Jim’s first attempt to gain Marlow’s confidence uses the argument of counterfactual role reversal: “Do you know what *you* would have done?” (52). The exonerating implications of this scenario are made clear by the French Lieutenant when he says that, in fact, anyone could be overtaken by fear and find themselves in a difficult situation. Jim tries other strategies to win Marlow’s trust: first, he relates a sad story that would inspire sorrow and pity in Marlow as he tells us that “I don’t think I’ve spoken three words to a living soul in all that time,” he said, making me very sorry for him” (53); secondly, Jim draws Marlow into a father-son relationship in order to involve him in the sort of responsibility for him that he, indeed, would agree to bear for the rest of their relationship.

The relation man-youth or father-son begins when Jim claims that Marlow’s age makes it possible for him to understand, which leads Marlow to envision this patronizing relationship: “What wonder that when some heavy prod gets home the bond is found to be close; that besides the fellowship of the craft there is felt the strength of a wider

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<sup>109</sup> Paul Italia, “‘No Joke!’: the Mediation of Ironic Humor in Conrad’s *Lord Jim*.” *Conradiana* 36.3 (Fall 2004): 211-2. Staton De Voren had made a similar point—yet extending the use of the burlesque, the irony, and the parody to the novel in a much broader sense—when analysing the effects of these devices in Marlow’s stand between the sentimental and cynicism, and as an expression of his own disorder (“Burlesque, Parody, and Analogue in *Lord Jim*: A Reading of the Novel.” *Comedy and Form in Joseph Conrad*. Hoffman, The Hague: Mouton, 1969).

feeling—the feeling that binds a man to a child” (79). Though this is the first manifestation of something like a father-son relationship, Marlow gestures in this direction from the beginning through his emphasis on Jim’s childish behavior and his youthful aspect. This metaphor for their relationship crops up continuously, as for instance: “He followed me as manageable as a little child, with an obedient air, with no sort of manifestation” (103).<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the intimacy between them suggested by this familiar allusion also strengthens the importance in the community of the British Merchant Marine—by extension the male bonding venerated in British imperialist practice, the centrality of which derives from the importance of masculinity in the Victorian age. Marlow’s paternalist attitude thus explains his desire to reclaim of Jim for the masculine community of imperial Britain.<sup>111</sup>

Marlow’s awareness of the motives that propel Jim’s telling at all times does not prevent him from submitting to Jim’s requests. Marlow’s succumbing to Jim’s persuasive discourse is conscious but unavoidable. In a lucid vision, Marlow understands this:

He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice. I felt the risk I ran of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed, bullied, perhaps, into taking a definite part in a dispute impossible of decision if one had to be fair to all the phantoms in possession—to the reputable that had its claims and to the disreputable that had its exigencies. (59)

A couple of examples might further illustrate this sense of Jim’s pleading for pity. In this case, persuasion is conducted by means of scattered expressions of feelings and anguish, and thoughts that influence the reporting of actions, claiming a certain degree of empathy.<sup>112</sup> When Jim is about to jump, and considering the plight of

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<sup>110</sup> Another example of the relation father-child is seen when Jim says he knew “nothing about it till I looked up” to what Marlow gives the indulgence he would give to his child: “And that’s possible too. You had to listen to him as you would to a small boy in trouble. He didn’t know. It had happened somehow. It would never happen again” (70). This relationship is extended to Jim’s father and to God as father in Robert Ducharme’s article “The Power of Culture in *Lord Jim*.” *Conradiana* 22.1 (1990): 3-24.

<sup>111</sup> See Sarah Cole’s article on the fractured treatment of male bonding in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and *Under Western Eyes*, “Conradian Alienation and Imperial Intimacy.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 44.2 (1998): 251-81.

<sup>112</sup> Bette London notices similar strategies in Marlow’s discourse in *Heart of Darkness*: “this tenderness appears as narrative excess: the dislodging of the *story*’s frame via

the 800 people aboard the *Patna* without sufficient boats for everyone, he feels an “overwhelming sense of his helplessness” to the extent that, as Marlow reports, “He confessed that his knees wobbled a good deal as he stood on the foredeck looking at another sleeping crowd” (54). The anguish and pathos in the episode of the pilgrim asking for water as the ship is sinking—and there is an urgent need to prepare the boats—is another example of this effect:

The beggar clung to me like a drowning man,’ he said impressively, ‘Water, water! What water did he mean? As calmly as I could I ordered him to let go. He was stopping me, time was pressing, other men began to stir; I wanted time—time to cut the boats adrift. He got hold of my hand now, and I felt that he would begin to shout. It flashed upon me it was enough to start a panic, and I hauled off with my free arm and slung the lamp in his face. The glass jingled, the light went out, but the blow made him let go, and I ran off—I wanted to get at the boats; I wanted to get at the boats. He leaped after me from behind. I turned on him. He would not keep quiet; he tried to shout; I had half throttled him before I made out what he wanted. (57)

Jim reports his reaction by emphasizing his innocence in the face of an overwhelmingly perilous situation that he did not fully understand at the time, so that his naïve point of view when the idea of jumping was first suggested would somehow diminish his culpability. When Jim finds the crew after seeing the water that was penetrating the ship, he reports the chief engineer’s words to him thus: “That’s what he said. Quick! As if anybody could be quick enough. ‘Aren’t you going to do something?’ I asked. ‘Yes. Clear out,’ he snarled over his shoulder.’ Jim explains his reaction to Marlow: “I don’t think I understood then what he meant” (58). Saying that he had not conceived the idea of leaving the ship without first waking the pilgrims is something that, told as it is in retrospect and with the benefit of hindsight by one aching to be pardoned, necessarily ought to be questioned, because Jim could be merely pretending that he was more innocent than he really felt. Both explanations, which are hard to believe for a reader already supplied with reasons to suspect Jim’s testimony, contain the paradox: they constitute a sign of Jim’s attempts to persuade, as well as helping to construct an image of Jim as an innocent, disoriented, pitiable man who happened to find himself in an “emergency” situation that could have happened to anyone—and this is one of Miller’s “extenuating

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interjections (‘You know’), exclamations (‘by all the stars!’), repetitions (‘devil . . . devil’, ‘men. . . men’), and direct address (‘I tell you’)” (33).

circumstances” (29) that enable Marlow’s vindication of Jim—but which is going to ruin his life completely. In fact, as Marlow’s effort to persuade the audience itself suggests, there are grounds for both suspicion and pity. As Jean-Pierre Juhel asserts, “l’équilibre précaire que tente de maintenir Marlow ne peut donc être garanti que par la duplicité du langage, c’est-à-dire par du ‘jeu’ supplémentaire dans l’outil même de la représentation.”<sup>113</sup> Jim’s story is indeed, difficult to judge, as only an ambivalent narrative voice will be able to express.

Even though Marlow is aware that he is being persuaded and attempts to stay detached, he begins to be amazed by Jim and to believe in his tragic innocence: “By Jove! he was amazing. ... I tell you it was fabulously innocent and it was enormous, enormous! I watched him covertly, just as though I had suspected him of an intention to take a jolly good rise out of me” (60). A little later Marlow once again makes Jim’s intentions explicit: “He burrowed deep, deep, in the hope of my absolution, which would have been of no good for him” (61). This is an ironic statement on a second reading, because Marlow is indeed going to absolve Jim merely by trusting him.

In some sense Jim is, like Marlow, an effective storyteller according to Marlow’s descriptions and references to his voice, ability to tell, and tone in narration. Marlow “only remember[s] that he managed wonderfully to convey the brooding rancour of his mind into the bare recital of events” (66). Certainly, Jim finds it easy to persuade Marlow due to his capacity for dramatic narration. However, Jim’s discourse seems disrupted to us, broken, not always clear, leaving much information aside, as Marlow himself declares:

I don’t pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog—bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country. They fed one’s curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation. Upon the whole he was misleading. (49)

It is precisely this characteristic of his speech that makes Marlow feel he has to infer so much of it, ultimately condemning him to everlasting doubt.

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<sup>113</sup> “A [not-so-clean] slate”: duplication, duplicité et ironie dans *Lord Jim*.” *L’Époque Conradianne* 31 (2005): 33.

The persuasive effect of the story and the gradual shortening of the distance between Marlow and Jim's accounts is narratively worked out by Marlow's changing of narrative perspective, and the intense merging and confusing of Jim's words with his own, "to the extent that Jim's narrative becomes virtually inseparable from Marlow's, except for the passages given in inverted commas. Marlow himself describes it as 'disjointed' (113), which may imply that he has edited it. The comments merge with the generalizing reflections, but interestingly both include elements of sympathy as well as distance" (Lothe 157).<sup>114</sup> The telling of the jump stands out as an example of this. The entangled words allow for a very close perspective that produces an atmosphere of intimacy in the most difficult moment of Jim's life. Thus he manages to condone his deed and persuade the audience.

A closer look at this episode can illuminate the power of this effect. Particularly relevant here in terms of Marlow's narrative strategy is Marlow's echoing of Jim's manipulation of time in the telling of the jump which is intended to persuade Marlow.<sup>115</sup> This temporal manipulation consists of a very extended and detailed description, physical as well as psychological, of the situation from Jim's limited perspective, followed by an ellipsis of the crucial action that constitutes the first act of a lifelong downfall, a deed that makes him an outcast forever.<sup>116</sup> More precisely, the final moment before the decision, when the lifeboat is already in the water waiting for him, lasts from page 66 to 69; this is followed by the ellipsis of the jump marked only by a silent dash: "...he looked into the open palm for quite half a

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<sup>114</sup> Catherine Delesalle has explored the uses of the changes in discourse (DS, IS, FIS) in *Lord Jim* and argues how they contribute to Marlow's misleading account in her "'The last word' or The Ambivalence of Quotation Marks in *Lord Jim*." *L'Époque Conradienne*. Numéro spécial: *Lord Jim* 30 (2004): 29-46.

<sup>115</sup> Time and chronology in *Lord Jim* are interesting fields of experimentation that I do not have the opportunity to comment here. For this issue, see interesting remarks in Jacques Darras, *Joseph Conrad and the West: Signs of Empire*. London: McMillan Press, 1982, 28; Dwight H. Purdy, "The Chronology of *Lord Jim*." *Conradiana* 8.1 (1976): 81-2; and J. E. Tanner, "The Chronology and the Enigmatic End of *Lord Jim*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 21.4 (1967): 369-380.

<sup>116</sup> J. H. Stape reveals Conrad's borrowing of Louis Garneray's *Voyages, aventures et combats* (1853) and points out the climatic passage of the jump which has a clear antecedent in the aforementioned narrative. The psychological emphasis is placed later in the relationship of the main character with the rest of the crew, as in *Lord Jim*. See his article "'Gaining Conviction': Conradian Borrowing and the *Patna* Episode in *Lord Jim*." *Conradiana* 25.3 (1993): 222-234.

second before he blurted out—” “I had jumped . . . ? He checked himself, averted his gaze . . . ‘It seems,’ He added” (69). Whether this ellipsis means that the action is not important, or perhaps far too important to describe or even mention is uncertain, but what *is* certain is that the jump does not appear in the narrative, it has been ‘jumped.’ Of course, the emphasis here, not incidentally, is on Jim’s feelings about it, which have been interpreted to be honest. The narrative is, then, worried about the ‘why’, not the ‘how’. The ‘how’ belongs to the domain of the court. The ellipsis of the jump and the treatment of time in the aspect of duration (something that happens in just a couple of minutes is extendedly narrated) are also signs of the manipulation of a story to produce certain effects, in this case signs of Jim and Marlow’s complex persuasive narrative.<sup>117</sup> As Padmini Mongia suggests in relation to the jump episode:

Although Marlow often questions Jim’s mettle, by exploring the jump in terms of either its unknowability or the issues it raises about social demands and individual capability, he creates a sympathy for Jim which coerces the reader to suspend a similar judgment. The crucial detail of the *Patna* episode—the abandonment of the ‘human cargo’ (p. 14) by the white officials responsible for it—is consequently deemed incidental. Marlow’s narrative can thus be read as problematic if we accept his narrative voice as creating a motivated confusion that blurs the racial contours of the incident which is the origin of our interest in Jim.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> In his *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1980), Seymour Chatman explains the distinction between these two types of time in narrative: “There is a reading-time and there is a plot-time, or, as I prefer to distinguish them, discourse-time—the time it takes to peruse the discourse—and story-time, the duration of the purported events of the narrative. . . . Narratives establish a sense of a present moment, narrative NOW, so to speak. If the narrative is overt, there are perforce two NOWs, that of the discourse, the moment occupied by the narrator in the present tense (‘I’m going to tell you the following story’), and that of the story, the moment that the action began to transpire, usually in the preterite” (63). He also recalls the concept of Duration as formulated by Gérard Genette: “Duration concerns the relation of the time it takes to read out the narrative to the time the story-events themselves lasted” (68). This is the technical device that Jim and Marlow use to persuade. See Genette’s explication of the time devices in narrative of “Ordre,” “Durée,” and “Fréquence” in *Figures III* 77-182.

<sup>118</sup> Padmini Mongia, “Narrative Strategy and Imperialism in Conrad’s *Lord Jim*” *Studies in the Novel* 24.2 (Summer 1992): 176. This article goes much in the direction this dissertation works, for the author impressively considers both narrative technique and the history of imperialism.

The effect of misleading is amplified when we take into account what Allan Simmons labels “proleptic gestures,” which are very effective in this episode, since

Over-ingenious though this triple sequence may seem—from the non-jump on the training-ship, to the *Patna*-jump, to the jump over the stockade—making the *Patna*-jump the central term of the progression, highlights the disruptive effect upon our interpretation created by Jim’s failure to recall actually jumping. . . . This suppression raises the question of how we judge someone who is, paradoxically, innocent of the transgression he has committed. It also renders the narrative proleptic and analeptic about the moment it elides, implicitly questioning the figures through which the novel’s convergent meaning emerges.<sup>119</sup>

Despite adopting Jim’s perspective, Marlow’s reactions still pretend to show he is keeping his distance from Jim. To Jim’s most explicit admission of guilt after the jump, “It seems,” Marlow responds with a punch line: “Looks like it”(69). However, internally Marlow sympathizes with Jim; his telling of his feelings before the jump have touched Marlow in the way Jim intended:

His clear blue eyes turned to me with a piteous stare, and looking at him standing before me, dumfounded and hurt, I was oppressed by a sad sense of resigned wisdom, mingled with the amused and profound pity of an old man helpless before a childish disaster” (69).

At this moment, it can be said that Marlow has already been persuaded and has been completely involved in Jim’s story. In the present narration, therefore, his nearly total communion with Jim leads him to repeat the story of the moments immediately prior to the jump in the same persuasive mode Jim had deployed to tell Marlow. In this sense, although Jim would always remain obscure to Marlow, his irony is just a reflection of his doubt about Jim.

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<sup>119</sup> Allan H. Simmons, “‘He was misleading’: Frustrated Gestures in *Lord Jim*.” *Lord Jim: Centennial Essays* 41. Simmons observation that the juxtaposition of narrative levels creates a slippage between them that “threatens the reality of the text” (44) and therefore enters the realm of postmodern fictions about fictions. Proleptic associations are not only produced by the kind of gestures Simmons discusses, but also by sounds, as Denise Ginfrey demonstrates in her article “‘There is a weird power in the spoken word’: Authority in Question(s) in *Lord Jim*.” *L’Époque Conradianne*. Numéro spécial: *Lord Jim* 30 (2004): 65-80.

Another motive for Marlow's persuasion is related to Jim's attractive looks. Marlow portrays Jim as having a virtuous personality and being good-looking in appearance. As Terrence Doody claims by quoting Lionel Trilling's description of a hero as "one that looks like a hero; the hero is an actor—he act out his own high sense of himself" that "it is a mistake to dismiss the impact of appearances and their effect on so intimate an act as confession."<sup>120</sup> Indeed, Jim's looks clearly have an impact on Marlow's descriptions of him, which almost always contribute to project an image of Jim that compels sympathy. Here is the description of the first time he sees him:

The young chap, making no movement, not even stirring his head, just stared into the sunshine. This was my first view of Jim. He looked as unconcerned and unapproachable as only the young can look. There he stood, clean-limbed, clean-faced, firm on his feet, as promising a boy as the sun ever shone on; . . . He had no business to look so sound (29).

If in Marlow's puzzlement we can precisely locate the enigma, his positive impression of Jim's appearance nevertheless stands in contrast to the disgusting descriptions of the rest of the crew, and is reinforced by his sense that Jim belongs to his own community, a stance that will be further elaborated later on in relation to the expression "one of us." So, when the conversation over dinner is reported, Marlow's description of his pleasant impression at the sight of Jim in front of him also appeals to the audience's sympathies:

And all the time I had before me these blue, boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open bronzed forehead with a white line under the roots of clustering fair hair, this appearance appealing at sight to all my sympathies: this frank aspect, the artless smile, the youthful seriousness. He was of the right sort; he was one of us (50).<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Terrence Doody, *Confession and Community in the Novel*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1980, 139.

<sup>121</sup> See another clear example of this when Marlow first sees him: "I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance; he came from the right place; he was 'one of us.' Jim's pleasant appearance would be what, certainly, compels him to trust him and to be willing to help him, as he says in what needs to be read ironically to the reader that already knows the story of the novel: "I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes—and, by Jove! it wouldn't have been safe" (31).

But this attraction is not only based on his appearance, but also his personality and, what is more in doubt, his honesty. It is evident that Marlow for the most part trusts the image Jim is producing of himself—even though he warns that this man is obscure to him—as for example when he speculates on the state of his emotions in the lifeboat:

I believe that, in this first moment, his heart was wrung with all the suffering, that his soul knew the accumulated savour of all the fear, all the horror, all the despair of eight hundred human beings pounced upon in the night by a sudden and violent death (71).

Jim has not uttered a word about suffering over fate of the pilgrims, thus it is evident that this is the image Marlow constructs of Jim, a construction that is manifested in Marlow's urgency in seeking the approval of his audience when he appeals to them: "Hey, what do you think of it?" he cried with sudden animation. 'Wasn't he true to himself, wasn't he?'" (71). Marlow's insistent demand for consent—which London describes as "coerced consent" (43)—sources to a popular narrative device of persuasion, a rhetorical question that only admits an affirmative answer. Later on in the story, when presenting Jim's professional aptitudes demonstrated in his subsequent jobs, which he nonetheless quit without a word, Marlow says, "I remarked that people, perfect strangers took to him as one takes to a nice child. His manner was reserved, but it was as though his personal appearance, his hair, his eyes, his smile, made friends for him wherever he went" (119).

Hence, it is not only Jim who asks for pity and absolution, but also Marlow. Indeed, he pleads for pity for the character he is constructing, whom he would eventually call "my Jim" (121). He utilizes the interlocution mode once again, dramatizing Jim: "Can you imagine him, silent and on his feet half the night, his face to the gusts of rain, staring at sombre forms, watchful of vague movements, straining his ears to catch rare low murmurs in the stern-sheets!" (76). Marlow's tone, and continuously invoking and dramatizing the painful episode in the lifeboat, are narrative resources used to elicit pity for Jim. In this process of persuasion, as John Batchelor notes, "feeling comes before judgement; judgement continues to function but is at every turn clouded and compromised."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> John Batchelor, *Lord Jim*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1988, 88.

By the end of Chapter VIII Jim has not only managed to move Marlow, but has definitely persuaded him about the desolation and suffering of his soul, alone and helpless in the midst of a terrifying experience. Jim asks Marlow directly:

Don't you believe it? he inquired with tense curiosity. I was moved to make a solemn declaration of my readiness to believe implicitly anything he thought fit to tell me. (79)

At this point of the narrative it is clear that the attitude adopted by Marlow to protect himself from Jim, which is evident during their conversations in his ironic commentaries, scattered like drops at many disparate moments in the telling, does not correspond to the profound effect this man and his story have produced on him.<sup>123</sup> His inner thoughts, demonstrated in his telling of Jim and his story to other people, are reproduced in his selection of passages that emphasize the greatness of his protagonist, in the adulation manifest in his descriptions of Jim, in his exaltation of the latter's immense, amazing character. So the image Marlow constructs in his telling corresponds to his own perception of him, which is not coincident with his sometimes provocative, distanced immediate relationship with Jim.

Jim wants to be believed and understood because that helps him bear his burden:

You are an awful good sort to listen like this,' he said. 'It does me good. You don't know what it is to me. You don't ... words seemed to fail him. ... 'You don't know what it is for a fellow in my position to be believed—make a clean breast of it to an elder man. It is so difficult—so awfully unfair—so hard to understand' (79).

Faced with this gratefulness, it is very difficult for Marlow to stay detached and to refuse helping Jim. This is also a motive that compels him to believe Jim. Although Marlow thinks he is refusing pity to Jim, in response to Jim's question, "Don't you believe me?" he cried. 'I swear!... Confound it! You got me here to talk, and ... You must!... You said you would believe,' Marlow answered "'Of course I do,' I

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<sup>123</sup> This is shown for instance when Marlow still tries to convince himself despite being already persuaded: "He was guilty—as I had told myself repeatedly, guilty and done for; nevertheless, I wished to spare him the mere detail of a formal execution" (93).

protested, in a matter-of-fact tone which produced a calming effect” (80).

A new feeling of responsibility for Jim will sustain the whole story and its retelling. Indeed, after the long conversation in the hotel, Marlow decides to help Jim as much as he can because he feels that “There was nothing but myself between him and the dark ocean. I had a sense of responsibility” (105). In fact, what he feels for Jim at that moment is precisely what Jim had intended to elicit from Marlow: compassion. Marlow is now ready to say: “My compassion for him took the shape of the thought that I wouldn’t have liked his people to see him at that moment” (105).

Marlow feels so responsible for Jim that even his words and actions aim to reassure him that he is the helper and ally he had been looking for:

My talk was of the material aspect of his position; it had the sole aim of saving him from the degradation, ruin, and despair that out there close so swiftly upon a friendless, homeless man; I pleaded with him to accept my help. (110)

The factor that convinces Jim to accept Marlow’s help is that he has recommended Jim to a friend and made himself “unreservedly responsible” (111) for him.

Jim quits several jobs because he is terrified that anyone should know that he was one of the members of the crew that abandoned the sinking *Patna*. Apart from his lack of professional responsibility, Jim’s behaviour is seriously flawed when he pushes a man into the sea at the risk that he could drown. Marlow takes Jim in his ship and, instead of blaming him for his last action, feels only responsibility and pity once again.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> “I suppose you will understand that by that time I could not think of washing my hands of him. I took him away from Bangkok in my ship, and we had a longish passage. It was pitiful to see how he shrank within himself. . . . but my Jim, for the most part, skulked down below as though he has been a stowaway. He infected me so that I avoided speaking on professional matters, such as would suggest themselves naturally to two sailors during a passage. For whole days we did not exchange a word; I felt extremely unwilling to give orders to my officers in his presence” (121). Marlow shows himself so deeply affected by Jim’s failure that he overprotects him to the point of not speaking with his sailors in order not to in

The experience in Patusan, where Jim becomes a ruler, finally provides Marlow with fitting “materials for a heroic tale,” and therefore allows him to tell the story of Jim’s successes so that it would become famous, and therefore acquire some externals. Though the enigma surrounding Jim is still there, Marlow cannot help qualifying his experience in Patusan as a “victory,” in which he believes to have taken some part (136). However, without storytelling, it seemed that “to Jim’s successes there were no externals” (136), no fame for him in the outside world. Marlow’s dedication to his duty of bringing the memory of Jim’s success to the world is a response to the fact that he was “strong, true, wise, brave. He was all that. Certainly. He was more. He was great—invincible—and the world did not want him, it had forgotten him, it would not even know him” (189). Marlow’s telling is thus an exercise of memory, and it is precisely memory that is, as Claude Maisonnat reminds us, “undoubtedly a key factor in the quest for atonement.”<sup>125</sup>

Marlow’s description of Jim in Patusan only increases his sympathy for the character. The possibilities for depicting Jim in a very positive and successful light benefit from two new factors in the story, which would make it easier to pursue the defensive line of Jim’s portrayal, initiated by Marlow in the preceding narration. Both depend on the new settlement, this new space that allows “the narrative’s complicity with his dreaming,” as Con Coroneos puts it.<sup>126</sup> The first is that Jim is acting in a very heroic way and becomes the ruler of the community through his own efforts, both trusted and powerful. The second factor is that this self-fulfilment is possible thanks to the intrinsic characteristics Marlow attributes to Patusan: a place of death, of a reality different from the outside world, inferior in relation to the white world, remote, beyond external judgement, a place where there is freedom from the standard of conduct. This situation of inferiority and ignorance attributed to the place provides a contrast that makes Jim stand out, in a moral sense but also in terms of his capacity to act in what appears to be a successful way, in agreement with the standard code of conduct. In fact, many of the descriptions of Jim in Patusan exalt his figure by contrasting it to the world that surrounds him. The

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some way offend or make Jim feel bad. His pity has been progressively growing, though Jim has been acting worse.

<sup>125</sup> Claude Maisonnat, “‘Forgotten, unforgiven’: The Paradoxes of Memory in *Lord Jim*.” *L’Époque Conradienne*. Numéro spécial: *Lord Jim* 30 (2004): 115.

<sup>126</sup> Con Coroneos, *Space, Conrad, and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002, 146.

conditions of this new environment in the colonial space compel Marlow to subscribe to the framework of the Adventure novel for the continuation of his narrative. It is precisely through this use of the imperial genre that the process of persuasion can be finally completed. The various exotic descriptions, and the use of racial codes that populate the new scenario will be studied in detail in the next chapter.

Marlow and Jim's encounters in Patusan strengthen the intimacy of their relationship. Marlow thus recalls saying goodbye after his visit:

I believe I called him 'dear boy,' and he tacked on the words 'old man' to some half-uttered expression of gratitude . . . There was a moment of real and profound intimacy, unexpected and short-lived like a glimpse of some everlasting, of more saving truth. (145)

What the new situation means is that Jim no longer needs to prove himself trustworthy, right, and successful. This imbues Jim's discourse in his conversations with Marlow with a much more relaxed, satisfied tone. The extreme anguish of the beginning is over because Jim is "confident in the security of to-morrow" because he feels "there's no one where I am not trusted" in Patusan, that "I must feel—every day, every time I open my eyes—that I am trusted" (149). Jim seems to have found what he was looking for. There is a newfound confidence in his speech, as Marlow points out, "Now and then, though, a word, a sentence, would escape him that showed how deeply, how solemnly, he feels about that work which had given him the certitude of rehabilitation" (150). Though always expressing his own reservations, Marlow says that he "too was proud—of him, if no so certain of the fabulous value of the bargain. . . . I was more struck by the other gifts he had displayed. He had proved his grasp of the unfamiliar situation, his intellectual alertness in that field of thought. There was his readiness too! Amazing" (149).

In regards to the nature of Marlow's narration of events, although Marlow's heroic treatment of Jim, borrowed from popular imperial romance, contributes enormously to his glorification, the peculiar and wonderful touch of Marlow's complex, and always somehow different perspective is, nevertheless, in the still present enigma, which ultimately, and despite the heroism of the tale, retains the strongest hold on Marlow's mind, and works as a reminder of Jim's doubtful morality at the end of the novel. As Beth Sharon Ash observes, after Jim's restoration in Patusan,

Clearly, however, Marlow has not ceased either to wish or to doubt, since he does both splendidly and at the same time. And implicit in this doubleness is his effort to avoid recognition that Jim's example reflects not only on Jim's adolescent pipe-dreams, but also on 'our common life' in the world of imperialism, where adolescent illusions stand in for cultural ideals and norms. The unbearable lightness of Jim's magical idealism seduces Marlow in part because the alternative would be to face the cultural meaning of Jim's malady of fear, and hence risk the disintegration of Marlow's own social world.<sup>127</sup>

Thus, even on their last meeting, the affection in their relationship is evident again. Jim tells Marlow:

I must go on, go on for ever holding up my end, to feel sure that nothing can touch me. I must stick to their belief in me to feel safe and to-to' . . . He cast about for a word, seemed to look for it on the sea . . . 'to keep in touch with'. . . His voice sank suddenly to a murmur . . . 'with those whom, perhaps, I shall never see any more. With—with—you, for instance" (198)

Jim's last words still have the power to deeply move Marlow,

I was profoundly humbled by his words. 'For God's sake,' I said, 'don't set me up, my dear fellow; just look to yourself.' I felt a gratitude, an affection, for that straggler whose eyes had singled me out, keeping my place in the ranks of an insignificant multitude. (198).

Finally, Jim appears to Marlow, again reinforcing the affective relationship between a father and a child, "no bigger than a child—then only a speck, a tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world . . . . And suddenly, I lost him. . . ." (199). The power of this description rests upon the fact that Marlow's vision of him getting lost on the horizon is a metaphor for Jim's getting lost in the depths of Time, of History. He would be lost as a dream, an illusion. Jim would only remain in Marlow's mind and become real again in his retellings of him.

After this final vision of Jim in Patusan, Marlow's oral narrative ends. The frame narrator introduces the privileged man, the only person from Marlow's audience who seemed interested in the story of Jim.

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<sup>127</sup> Beth Sharon Ash, *Writing In Between: Modernity and Psychosocial Dilemma in the Novels of Joseph Conrad*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999, 161.

Marlow will send him the last of Jim's remaining documents in his possession: a letter from his father and a small piece of paper showing an intention to write something he never did. Attached to this is a letter from Marlow and his narration of Jim's last days in Patusan. In spite of new information about Jim's decision that Gentleman Brown can leave Patusan, and how this decision would lead to the killing of Doramin, Marlow remains determined not to condemn him, and to forgive him once again. The last part of the novel is ambivalent, since there is a prevalence of attempts at atonement as well as a final vindication of the doubt. As a brief example of this, in the letter Marlow sends to the privileged man he narrates his encounter with Jewel after Jim has been killed. Jewel is furious about his desertion of her. Marlow on the other hand is adamant about what her attitude toward Jim should be: "You must forgive him" (208). Yet a complex questioning of the adventure novel as genre is going to preserve the effect of the doubt, as we shall see in the next chapter.

The Gentleman Brown episode changes the perception of Jim's ultimate success, reinforcing Marlow's ambivalent perspective. Victory is not that clear now for Marlow. His final attitude towards Jim is ambiguous. At the end of the novel, on the one hand, Marlow says that Jim "passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic." On the other hand, despite this melancholy perspective, which is in part reconstituted (remembering and forgiving) through his telling, Marlow qualifies Jim's life as an "extraordinary success."<sup>128</sup> However, there is still the shadow of a doubt about whether he is referring ironically to what would have been Jim's perception of himself. Afterwards, he qualifies him as an "obscure conqueror of fame" with an "exalted egoism" that has left behind a woman to celebrate his "wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct." Nevertheless, it is only after this complex contraposition of positive and negative elements of the figure of Jim which contain the enigma, that Marlow comes back to the idea that Jim is "one of us": "He is one of us—and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost,

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<sup>128</sup> The novel's ending is so ambivalent that it has inspired contrasting interpretations, such as the reading that the Malays are going to start a revolution, as Tom Henthorne suggests in his book *Conrad's Trojan Horses: Imperialism, Hybridity, & the Postcolonial Aesthetic* (Lubbock: Texas Tech UP, 2008), or that it represents the commitment between Jim and his redemption and Jim and the Patusani, as Grazyna Branny points out in her book *A Conflict of Values: Alienation and Commitment in the novels of Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner*. (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Sponsor, 1997, 80.)

to answer for his eternal constancy?” He adds “Was I so very wrong after all?” (246). This final recognition of Jim as, ultimately, “one of us” could be read as Marlow’s one last act of forgiveness of Jim, his last refuge from doubt, his final shelter from the constant battering of the enigma. The certainty of the precariousness of beliefs, which results in the narration in Marlow’s fathoming of “the narrative presentation of Jim’s problem as intrinsically difficult and possibly even insoluble”<sup>129</sup> is thus, albeit very reluctantly, the only remaining and vertiginous conviction.

Hence, this analysis elucidates Henry James’ concern about Conrad’s placing of the narrative method at the centre of the telling, and its effects of shading the ‘object produced,’ in this case Jim. As Julian Ferraro argues, “almost every incident in *Lord Jim* involves an act of persuasion in one form or another and the same ambivalence with which Marlow regards Jim can be seen in the attitude towards these transactions, and their implications for the relationship between storyteller, protagonists and audience, that informs the novel.”<sup>130</sup> If this is the case, thus, it is not only worth analysing the development of this “gaining conviction” through pity and commitment in the novel, but also, and no less importantly, the problematic nature of the very process itself.

It is precisely at this point that persuasion as such cannot be relegated to partaking of the general effects of narrative fiction—or, even more generally, any linguistic exercise—but needs to be regarded as the central problem established by the narrative in the telling of its story. Indeed, Conrad’s method in *Lord Jim* elaborates the narrative of persuasion in a way that its approach to the narrative enigma is not only perceived as human, but as biased as well. Marlow approaches the deciphering of the narrative enigma by means of persuading his audience to agree to believe. It is in this intersection between narrative enigma and narrative persuasion where this conflict becomes pivotal: the problem of narrative reliability is here staged. If the process of persuasion has been clarified thus far, several particular features of

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<sup>129</sup> Jakob Lothe, “Conradian Narrative” 169.

<sup>130</sup> Julian Ferraro, “Jim, Marlow, and the reader: Persuasion as theme in *Lord Jim*.” *The Conradian* 20.1/2 (Spring-autumn 1995): 3. I was glad to find this article, where the author had chosen the word “persuasion” to qualify Marlow and Jim’s discourses. I had felt this was the word I needed and this article helped to reassure me on this point.

narrative in Marlow's voice firmly and textually settle Marlow's problematic credibility.

### c) Signs of narrative persuasion

Persuasion does not necessarily imply unreliability. Rather, persuasion works in all narrations, but has decisive effects when used as the means of conducting a narrative itself concerned with epistemology, and thus, with reliability. Certainly, the study of persuasion is inescapable when it is used to disturb the telling of the story, establishing a distance between narrator and story that deteriorates the credibility both of the narrative voice and of the account rendered. I insist therefore that persuasion works as a narrative strategy when reliability itself becomes the conflict of the novel. This is the case in *Lord Jim* as well as *Absalom, Absalom!*

As we have seen, Marlow's discourse is so strongly persuasive in its aim of exonerating Jim that the novel itself draws attention to its excesses by placing many textual signs of persuasion, or what Phelan calls "instances of unreliability" when referring to Marlow's discourse ("I affirm" 48). As I stated before, although the signs I will note here run parallel to the ones pointed out by Phelan, I prefer to maintain the idea of an emphasized process of persuasion rather than resorting to the concept of "unreliability," which appears to me unsuitable for Marlow as it is currently defined by literary critics. Marlow's discourse contains clues that suggest that we should take his interpretation with "a grain of salt," which is not exactly "against the grain of the text" (Olson 94), which in turn would be the attitude required from the reader by unreliability. These signs refer mainly to Jim's duplicity, which Marlow does not underscore but nevertheless subtly reports. This is evident in his way of persuading us to see a Jim who is immersed in a doubt, but who is ultimately forgiven and welcome back, for he is said to be simply a honest man, "one of us." The telling compels us to believe Marlow, but his own statements about himself and his narrative, the declaration of his interests and motives, and his personal highly connoted language conditioning the telling, encourage suspicion in his audience. Besides, other narrative signals, such as how Jim acts in contrast to how he and Marlow interpret his action in their narratives, and the contraposition of other narrative voices who present other points of view about Jim, suggest a warning that Marlow should be taken as a narrator prone to misjudgement. Marlow receives

Jim through the image Jim has constructed of himself for Marlow, which gives rise to his doubts. In turn, Jim is filtered through Marlow for his audiences (narratees and readers). Hence, for us Marlow is the irresolvable doubt that he says we should look for in Jim. We are thus faced with multiple mediators, all of them distorting our personal apprehension of the enigma of Jim, and the enigma of Marlow, as James had warned.

To begin with, the first sign of discordance is that Jim's behavior appears strange and duplicitous to the reader as a result of the multiple signs that the image he projects is not coincident with what he really is. The reader finds out that this duplicity of character, which is placed at the centre of the narrative in the form of the enigma, does not ultimately account for Marlow's presentation of Jim as 'one of us,' forgiven and remembered. Certainly, in the light of evidence pointing at Jim's moral ambivalence, Marlow is somewhat subtler when dealing with this issue; the underscoring of its relevance is thus left to the reader's attention and wit. Ironically, in his efforts to keep a sceptical attitude, Marlow himself is initially in charge of warning the audience about Jim's duplicity, thus preparing them to distance themselves from Marlow's eventual judgments.

Jim appears to act in his own interests rather than in the service of moral imperatives or noble feelings, as both his narrative and Marlow suggest. There are several moments where this distance between what he says and what he really might be thinking about is manifested. During their conversation in the Malabar House, Marlow has the disturbing feeling that he cannot see Jim clearly, which arouses in him and the reader a sense of suspicion about Jim. Marlow's comments on Jim's storytelling introduce similar feelings on several occasions, such as when he observes that "I didn't know what he was playing up to—if he was playing to anything at all—and suspect he did not know either" (51) or "I was made to look at the convention that lurks in all truth and on the essential sincerity of falsehood" (59).<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Other examples of this are: "He drew quick breathes at every few words and shot quick glances at my face, as though in his anguish he were watchful of the effect. He was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality" (59); "I watched him covertly, just as though I had suspected him of an intention to take a jolly good rise out of me" (60).

There are also intriguing aspects in Marlow's telling that, albeit related to his defence of Jim, emit a strange sense of falsehood. Some episodes in particular are worth noting. In Marlow's indirect mode of reporting Jim's feelings, he points out: "He assured me, with evident anxiety to be believed, that he had been most careful to keep them [the lifeboats] ready for instant service. He knew his duty. I daresay he was a good enough mate, as far as that went" (57). Marlow's uncritical trusting of Jim appears discordant to the reader with regards to his ultimate jump and Brierly's related commentaries, which appear later in the narrative. The assertion that Jim knew his duty and was a good enough mate is in contrast with Brierly's report that "There were several questions before the court. The first as to whether the ship was in every respect fit and seaworthy for the voyage. The court found it was not" (97). It is strange that a man like Jim, who was in charge of getting ready many things on board, should be doing his duty properly in knowing—as it seems obvious—that the ship was not in good condition for the voyage. It is a matter of responsibility and duty when allowing 800 people to come aboard. This new information casts some doubt over Jim's morality as well as Marlow's judgments.

There is another episode that makes Jim's strategies of persuasion more explicit, at the same time that it reveals his attitude towards the truth of what he is telling. If we remember how Jim tells Marlow about his sincere and noble feelings before he jumps from the *Patna*, and we recall his words full of innocence and shame when forced to admit that he had jumped, an action that is only confessed to indirectly ("I had jumped. . . . It seems"), we are greatly surprised to hear that he insists upon having actually jumped when prompted by the crew in the fugitive boat: "I did. I was plainly there with them—wasn't I?" (74) and, further, "Oh yes, I know very well—I jumped. Certainly. I jumped! I told you I jumped; but I tell you they were too much for any man" (77). Jim reproduces his anxiety in the lifeboat when he needed the jumping members of the crew to feel that he was one of them, though afterwards he insists to Marlow that he should be distinguished from them. What is interesting here is that Jim tries at all times to suit his companion's and audience's expectations in order to be trusted. That is what the novel seems to suggest many times. Marlow points out his duplicity: Jim is more concerned about his image in front of others than about values, he is worried about being trusted, even disregarding whether the image he projects corresponds to his inner personality and morality or not. Jim's preoccupation with

self-representation is suggested, for instance, when in search of a job, the following conversation takes place:

“‘All the same, one is responsible.’ He watched me like a hawk [Jim]  
“‘And that’s true, too,’ I said. [Marlow]  
“‘Well. I’ve gone with it to the end, and I don’t intend to let any man cast in my teeth without—without—resenting it.’ He clenched his fist.  
“‘There’s yourself,’ I said with a smile—mirthless enough, God knows—but he looked at me menacingly. ‘That’s my business,’ he said. An air of indomitable resolution came and went upon his face like a vain and passing shadow. (109)

Jim’s notion that it is important to be trusted and never to let people know what he had done, is repeated in Patusan, where he finds the perfect circumstances for that: the Malays will never know or understand what he had done in the past. For Jim, the only important matter is to be trusted: “‘Leave! Why! That’s what I was afraid of. It would have been—it would have been harder than dying. No—on my word. Don’t laugh. I must feel—every day, every time I open my eyes—that I am trusted—that nobody has a right—don’t you know?’” (149). When Marlow visits him, Jim proudly boasts about his regained confidence:

“‘I talk about being done with it—with the bally thing at the back of my head . . . Forgetting . . . Hang me if I know I can think of it quietly. After all, what has it proved? Nothing. I suppose you don’t think so . . .’  
“‘I made a protesting murmur.  
“‘No matter,’ he said. ‘I am satisfied . . . nearly. I’ve got to look only at the face of the first man that comes along, to regain my confidence. They can’t be made to understand what is going on in me. What of that? Come! I haven’t done so badly.’  
“‘Not so badly,’ I said.  
. . .  
“‘Aha! You see,’ he said, crowing, as it were, over me placidly. ‘Only,’ he went on, ‘you just try to tell this to any of them here. They would think you a fool, a liar, or worse. And so I can stand it.’ (182)

In this passage we see a Jim who is not only unconcerned about his responsibility in the *Patna* affair but who, scornfully, even feels entitled to deny that he ever jumped, armed with the faith of his people as protectors of his fame. By this explicit duplicity it is once again suggested to the reader not to trust Jim in the way Marlow does.

Moreover, we could read his statement as a mirror warning for Marlow, and the reader's conviction: belief might even negate facts.

A very remarkable aspect that reveals the chasm between Jim's acts and his image are Jim's violent impulses, which Marlow only mentions indirectly. On closer examination, there is an incident through which it becomes clear that Jim should definitely be taken out of the world and sent to a marginal place, which involves a great amount of violence:

I don't know that I blame Jim very much, but it was a truly regrettable incident. ... The fellow, of course, was utterly hopeless at billiards, but he did not like to be beaten, I suppose. He had had enough to drink to turn nasty after the sixth game, and make some scornful remark at Jim's expense. Most of the people there didn't hear what was said, and those who had heard seemed to have had all precise recollection scared out of them by the appalling nature of the consequences that immediately ensued. It was very lucky for the Dane that he could swim, because the room opened on a verandah and the Menam flowed below very wide and black. A boat-load of Chinamen, bound, as likely as not, on some thieving expedition, fished out the officer of the King of Siam, and Jim turned up at about midnight on board my ship without a hat. 'Everybody in the room seemed to know,' he said, gasping yet from the contest, as it were. He was rather sorry, on general principles, for what had happened, though in this case there had been, he said, 'no option'. ... Naturally after this he couldn't remain in the place. He was universally condemned for the brutal violence, so unbecoming a man in his delicate position; some maintained he had been disgracefully drunk at the time; others criticised his want of tact. (120)

This passage proves how indirectly Marlow reports Jim's aggressiveness and how far the Jim he is portraying is from this other Jim that appears before us as rather deceptive and violent.

Another example is the moment when Jim, after shooting a man, seems to force the three remaining men to drown themselves when discovering they have a plan to kill him (180). This cruel response to the three men that have been arrested by Jim elicits no commentary from Marlow. Jim's propensity for violence is only vaguely suggested in the novel, to the extent that we overlook it, principally because Marlow does not let us know whether Jim was a violent man or not, in what appears as a clear manipulation of the story. This last mentioned episode is an example of it, just as much as the violence implicit in the

description of what Jim was intending to be his house, which is in fact a Fort:

‘The Fort, Patusan.’ I suppose he had carried out his intention of making out of his house a place of defence. It was an excellent plan: a deep ditch, and earth wall topped by a palisade, and at the angles guns mounted on platforms to sweep each side of the square. (202)<sup>132</sup>

We could think of Jim’s aggressiveness as a result of his falling into a world of disorder after his instinctual jump from the *Patna*, which Stanton De Voren explains as depicted by the use of the burlesque in the novel. As he puts it: “In failing to order the unconscious, to order the destructive elements which are part of the dream, in failing to establish a relationship between the dream and the objective world, Jim surrenders to disorder, fails to be, becomes less than human, loses essential form, comes close to the irrational and bestial” (64). Regardless of the motives for his violent actions—which nonetheless allow us to understand Marlow’s defence of his friend—, these episodes portray a Jim far away from the noble and innocent person that he and later Marlow are trying to render. Hence, Jim’s dual personality is subtly apparent in the novel through the aforementioned situations.

Logically, since Marlow is the authorized narrator of Jim’s story, his narrative itself is the main source that reveals his own discordance. One of the reasons to argue that Marlow’s persuasion goes far beyond a neutral perspective is that he uses a highly connoted language and constantly judges people at first sight, offering a degrading image of them, clearly exaggerated descriptions that give a very strong sense of the judgmental personality of the narrator. As Batchelor suggests, “Marlow the historian is powerfully challenged by Marlow the puppeteer: the illusion that the evidence is being presented for our judgement is regularly cut across by firm indicators of how we should judge” (153). Indeed, Marlow’s often highly contemptuous language belies the possible assumption that the narrator, though characterized,

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<sup>132</sup> There is another episode in which Jim, at the moment when the *Patna* is sinking, is stopped by one of the Moslem passengers who asks him for water for his child, and Jim slung the lamp in his face. On this passage, Ash comments how this is a manifestation of “Jim’s paranoid-schizoid anxiety,” which appears constantly as intense fear (157).

should convey his experience and tell his tale with the minimum intrusion of personal opinion and the most objective perspective.

Here, Cohn's wise distinction of "discordant narration" is again adequate to describe how Conrad invokes not unreliability proper but rather the process of persuasion engaged in by Marlow, or, put otherwise, Marlow's ambivalent credibility. For this purpose, I shall utilize Cohn's distinction of the two ways through which discordant narrators express their subjective opinions: "by way of generalizing judgmental sentences that are grammatically set apart from the narrative language by being cast in the present tense," on the one hand, and "by judgmental phrases that infiltrate descriptive and narrative language and that often apply to the other characters of the fictional world," on the other. The author has labelled these two ways of commenting "gnomic" and "adjective" correspondingly (307-8). In this light, it is apparent that Marlow's judgments are biased and project an image of the characters that is negatively determined, which makes it nearly impossible for the audience to imagine them in another way. This is notable early in the narrative, as when he describes members of the *Patna* crew: "and the sunlight beating on him brought out his bulk in a startling way. He made me think of a trained baby elephant walking on hind-legs" (26) or "There was a sallow-faced, mean little chap with his arm in a sling, and a long individual in a blue flannel coat, as dry as a chip and no stouter than a broomstick, with drooping grey moustaches, who looked about him with an air of jaunty imbecility" (28).<sup>133</sup> Marlow's descriptions become more disparaging as they approach the section of Patusan, especially with regards to 'racially' different individuals. Prejudice and negative judgment merge there perversely, as it will be shown further below.<sup>134</sup>

As different issues arise, Marlow repeatedly interrupts the narrative to offer his own comments about it, giving his personal beliefs and

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<sup>133</sup> There are many examples of this: "an obliterating little Portuguese half-caste with a miserably skinny neck" (27) or "he reminded you of one of those snuffy, quiet village priests, into whose ears are poured the sins, the sufferings, the remorse of peasants" (85). C. B. Cox comments on the first of the quoted examples in the text: "We know that he [the German Captain] is disgusting and contemptible, and it is worth emphasizing here, before we lose ourselves in too much epistemological uncertainty, that the moral perspective in this instance is clear" (21).

<sup>134</sup> See Anne Luyat's article "The Crescendo of the Grotesque in *Lord Jim*" (*L'Époque Conradienne*. Numéro spécial: *Lord Jim* 30, 2004, 107-114) for a tracing of the increasing presence of this device with its ultimate culmination in Gentleman Brown.

opinions: “for it is my belief no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge” (51), or “[t]he real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind, and from that point of view he was no mean traitor, but his execution was a hole-and-corner affair. There was no high scaffolding, no scarlet cloth (did they have scarlet cloth on Tower Hill? They should have had), no awe-stricken multitude to be horrified at his guilt and be moved to tears at his fate—no air of sombre retribution” (96).

Judgments about general matters as well as people would be deeply influenced by prejudice when Marlow is required to represent “race.” Although this aspect should be analyzed further on to determine the functions of particular racial representations in the novel, at this point we should refer to one passage also dealing with race but which can be considered a signal for discordance. In the opening of Chapter XIV, Marlow introduces the problem of his black chief mate:

though my chief mate was an excellent man all round, he was the victim of such black imaginings that if he did not get a letter from his wife at the expected time he would go quite distracted with rage and jealousy, lose all grip on the work, quarrel with all hands, and either weep in his cabin or develop such a ferocity of temper as all but drove the crew to the verge of mutiny. The thing had always seemed inexplicable to me: they had been married thirteen years; I had a glimpse of her once, and, honestly, I couldn't conceive a man abandoned enough to plunge into sin for the sake of such an unattractive person. I don't know whether I have not done wrong by refraining from putting that view before poor Selvin: the man made a little hell on earth for himself, and I also suffered indirectly, but some sort of, no doubt, false delicacy prevented me. The marital relations of seamen would make an interesting subject, and I could tell you instances... However, this is not the place, nor the time, and we are concerned with Jim—who was unmarried (95).

As Marlow himself admits, there is no point in commenting on the private marital life of this concerned black man. Marlow's perspective is clearly delimited by prejudice. This anecdote is neither elegant nor useful in terms of the development of the plot. In fact, the commentary on his chief mate reveals Marlow as ideologically blinkered but also as disrespectful in the sense that he dares to raise and pronounce judgement on an issue that has nothing to do with the narration, for the mere satisfaction of his curiosity and scornful

representation of people. As Greaney suggests, on occasions like these “the storytelling on which Conrad [I would say Marlow here] speech community thrives degenerates all too easily into gossip, hearsay, or rumour, discourses that are degraded and emptied of authority by thoughtless repetition” (5).

Though Marlow’s commentary on his own narrative has the function of reminding the reader of his limited knowledge and his difficulties in telling Jim’s story, on the other hand, it also points at the construction of narrative and Marlow’s constant awareness of it. Awareness does not necessarily mean manipulation, but it suggests its possibility. It is obvious that any narrator, whether he refers to his or her own narrative or not, organizes a discourse. However, those that do reflect on the process of storytelling have the function of making the reader focus on this particular aspect. Indeed, the reader is constantly reminded of the existence of a very self-conscious and skilful narrator engaged in constructing a discourse. In this sense, it is fair that the reader should consider aspects such as ordering, repetition, time and space in Marlow’s narrative. Some of these are of great importance due to the narrative effect that they have on the audience, such as for instance the manipulation of time, which achieves its greater moment of dilatation followed by a sudden contraction in the time of the narrative in relation to the time of the story at the moment prior to the jump and the jump itself.

Thus, metafictional commentary works in the same direction as the already observed commentaries about the ineffability of experience. One instance that suggests that an attentive audience should have a more accurate perspective on Jim is when Marlow says: “You may be able to tell better, since the proverb has it that the onlookers see most of the game” (136); in another, a distance is established between the narrator’s version and that of the reader, though Marlow is so self-confident that he affirms the superiority of his own, while scornfully rejecting that of his audience:

I affirm he had achieved greatness; but the thing would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the hearing. Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust, but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies. I do not mean to be offensive; it is respectable to have no illusions—and safe—and profitable—and dull. (136)

If, as Alan Warren Friedman states, Marlow's "typical thrusting of conclusions at us before the evidence" are meant to make us "question the ultimate authority of such a grand pronouncement," in addition to the already analysed ones, these two commentaries function as signs of the intense persuasion conducted in Marlow's narrative and, consequently, encourage the reader to find his own version, considering Marlow's inconsistencies.<sup>135</sup>

Marlow's commentaries about his own motives and about his personality work as signals to the reader of what constraints the reader should expect from his narrative. They account for the persuasive mode of narration, since their ostentation reveals them to be clear signs of narrative misleading. In addition to the motives and the comments indicated above, related to his aim of clearing up a doubt and his attention to attitudes more than facts, we should also consider some intriguing signs of veiled egoism that Marlow does not define, though he mentions it twice: "I don't pretend to explain the reasons of my desire—I don't think I could; but if you haven't got a sort of notion by this time, then I must have been very obscure in my narrative." And further, "In this transaction, to speak grossly and precisely, I was the irreproachable man; but the subtle intentions of my immorality were defeated by the moral simplicity of the criminal. No doubt he was selfish too, but his selfishness had a higher origin, a more lofty aim" (93). Certainly, the reader is given basis for being suspicious about Marlow.

Whereas Marlow's narrative itself contains many features that bare his process of persuasion, the contraposition in the novel of other narrative voices also makes a very relevant contribution to it. As a narrative strategy in *Lord Jim*, the multiplicity of voices is twofold. From the point of view of the limitation of knowledge, "the multiple

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<sup>135</sup> Alan Warren Friedman, "Conrad's Picaresque Narrator." *Marlow* 69. As Lothe remarks too, "the question of Marlow's ambivalent attitude to his sources is focused on once again. On the one hand, he makes reservations, almost excuses, regarding the biased and subjective account this fact results in: 'It is impossible to say how much he lied to Jim then, how much he lied to me now—and to himself always. Vanity plays lurid tricks with our memory, and the truth of every passion wants some pretence to make it live' (383). The last part of the quotation is particularly interesting, since its implications seem not to be limited to this sequence, but also to extend to the other parts of Marlow's narrative. This particular sentence, then, gives a more distinctly thematic dimension to the problem of narrative reliability" (*Conrad's* 169).

narrator technique that Conrad employs in *Lord Jim* and elsewhere demonstrates the limited point of view from which each narrator experiences Jim. . . . Of the various narrators who assess Jim, only Marlow considers the possibility of a gap between his perception of Jim and an actual knowledge of Jim. Marlow recognizes his own perceptual limitations and solicits the experience of other perceivers in order to supplement or confirm his own perception and to come, perhaps, to a more complete knowledge of Jim.”<sup>136</sup> Indeed, Marlow’s movement is twofold in the sense that, on the one hand, he embraces the other voices as part of his persuasive project by making them address the narrative enigma he has posed, and by not allowing them to develop as fully viable alternatives to his version; yet at the same time, his mere acknowledgment that he has a limited perception turns into a gesture of welcoming other voices into the telling, whose incipient alternative accounts, however, paradoxically confirm not only his limited perception but his persuasive narrative project as well. With regards to the contrastive voices, the frame narrator functions at the heterodiegetic level. Within the intradiegetic level of Marlow’s narrative—what Genette would call the metadiegetic level—Brierly, the French Lieutenant and Stein are generally considered the most important ones, though we should also include Jewel’s and Gentleman Brown’s testimonies. I shall provide brief indications on their contrasting functions but, since full understanding of their perceptions and uses in Marlow’s storytelling affects the representation of “race,” some are analyzed in detail in the next chapter.

As we have seen, the frame narrator functions as a counterpoint to Marlow in his narration of episodes, such as the training one, where Jim’s duplicity is very much in contrast with the image of honesty and fortitude given by Marlow. The contrast provided by the frame narrator is not only produced in relation to Jim but also with regard to “race.” Its voice is a relevant sign of discordance because of its narrative authority outlined above.

Captain Brierly works in what seems to be Marlow’s first vision of Jim. He does not accept Jim’s behavior, because he considers that it tarnishes the reputation of their community and scorns their moral code. The community’s need is of being held together and trusted by

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<sup>136</sup> John G. Peters, *Conrad and Impressionism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001, 64. On the theme of subjective perception and knowledge in Conrad, this book is outstanding.

the people who surround them. What is significant in this voice is that Brierly does not attend to facts, as the Inquiry does, but rather to the question why one of them has dared to threaten their standard of conduct. He fiercely reproves Jim's deed and appears to everybody as the paragon of proper and virtuous conduct. However, his troubled internal identity results in his suicide, in a way that Jim's claim that weakness is inherent in the human condition proves true even in the most exemplary man.<sup>137</sup> Brierly's voice seems to function as a way of pointing out the collective dimension of the conflict, and as a factual demonstration that the human condition is at odds with the fixed standard of conduct. It seems that Brierly's interest in this case is in some ways coincident with Marlow's, since as Robert Hampson affirms "where Jim's concerned primary with his idealised self-image, Marlow's main interest is the threat that Jim's failure poses to the larger community who live by the code of the sea."<sup>138</sup> Despite their agreement over the problematic correspondence between self and ideal, the contrast between Marlow's and Brierly's opinion is remarkable because Brierly strongly disapproves of Jim's behavior instead of defending it and, thus, as Anthony Winner says, his voice in itself constitutes a "tactic" to "untrustworthiness" in a way that Marlow's narrative adopts to subvert "his audiences' fixed standards of understanding."<sup>139</sup>

The French Lieutenant in certain ways performs the same function of condemning Jim. He is the one who finds the abandoned ship, and remains aboard to make sure that it would not sink while it is being towed to a safe port. He is responding to the call of duty, which Jim failed to do. As Lothe affirms "the lieutenant is not a MacWhirr who seems unaware of the threat of fear ('Given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come', he says (146)), but his ability to resist it is at once greater and more unproblematic than Jim's; it is also more closely connected with the concept of honour. . . . here it seems as though the moral integrity and impressive posture of the lieutenant

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<sup>137</sup> Brierly's suicide has been read as a proleptic gesture of Jim's suicide. For an exploration of the correlation between suicide, death and structures of absence in *Lord Jim* see the chapter dedicated to the novel in Paul Wake's *Conrad's Marlow: Narrative and Death in 'Youth,' Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim and Chance*. Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 2007.

<sup>138</sup> Robert Hampson, *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, 124.

<sup>139</sup> Anthony Winner, *Culture and Irony: Studies in Joseph Conrad's Major Novels*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1988, 23.

provoke Marlow into a more active defense of Jim” (*Conrad’s* 159). Thus, the French Lieutenant sympathizes with Marlow’s opinion about human fear, but he is pessimistic about the possibility of regaining lost honour.<sup>140</sup> In particular, as Ralph Rader asserts, “his point about honor is crucial to the value structure everywhere implicit in the action, and to keep the reader from moderating the point, the dishonourable (as with the German captain and Chester) are consistently represented as outside the pale of the human community, odious and vile.”<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, the kind of honor he demonstrates on the *Patna* contrasts with the accounts offered by the “light literature” of the adventure novel, as Murfin suggests:

To have wanted to act, and to have acted, in a way that is at one selfless, dangerous, and ‘judged proper’ by others is, of course, to have acted heroically, although the French lieutenant has a way of describing heroic action in such a modesty, as reflected in matter-of-fact language, is important. Finally, the kind of heroism that would justify our faith in the viability of idealistic codes of conduct might simply involve doing what it *seems* like anyone would do because, after all, it is the only proper thing *to* do. The language of the hero would thus inevitably be simple and straightforward. It would probably be unmarked by poetic or epic diction of the kind that, as a young man, Jim encountered in romantic books (70)

The challenge in the conception of honor in relation to the heroic affects not only the judgement of Jim’s deeds but also Marlow’s subscription to the adventure novel in the Patusan section, strengthening its criticism brought back by the persistence of the doubt, as we will see. In any case, the French Lieutenant offers a comprehensive alternative to Marlow’s reading of Jim.

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<sup>140</sup> Richard Ambrosini discusses quite extensively the French Lieutenant’s voice and Stein’s as counterpoint and revelation of the harmony of life’s contradictions, respectively. From his point of view, narrative voices contribute to creating the critical discourse that shapes the novel. In regards to the French Lieutenant’s episode, he observes that “when the Lieutenant stressed that only honor is real, Marlow’s hope that the old seaman would share his own sympathy for Jim’s youthful illusions is crushed” (*Conrad’s Fiction as Critical Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991, 144). As for the issue of honor, see Zdzislaw Najder’s chapter on *Lord Jim* in his *Conrad in perspective: Essays on art and fidelity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

<sup>141</sup> Ralph W. Rader, “*Lord Jim* and the Formal Development of the English Novel.” *Reading Narrative: Form, Ethics, Ideology*. Ed. James Phelan. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1989, 230. The ahistorical, yet “universal” perspective of this essay is discussed by Michael Sprinker’s essay—whose objections I share—“Fiction and Ideology: *Lord Jim* and the Problem of Literary History,” *Ibid.* 236-249.

Stein is a character that has been thoroughly analyzed. He certainly defines Jim as Marlow has been trying to do, and his reading of him as a romantic matches the frame narrator's perception of Jim, as well as Marlow's in many respects. After Stein's interpretation of Jim, Marlow seems to adopt Stein's point of view because it might provide an explanation that would be suitable to Jim's thirst for success and heroism. In this sense, I do not have the feeling that Stein's description of Jim contradicts Marlow's view but rather complements it, further encouraging the inclination to forgive Jim's attitudes and acts.<sup>142</sup> For Linda M. Shires, this episode contributes to shaping Conrad's ambivalence towards dreams and romantic adventures when contrasted with the privileged man episode, since "Stein represents part of the implied author's emotional identification with Jim's romanticism and acts as a reflection of Marlow's own cautious approval. The mysterious 'privileged man,' as the other half of this dual focus, represents that part of the implied author, and that part of Marlow which can govern emotion and rely on society's ethical norms."<sup>143</sup>

Finally, Jewel's voice, as filtered and commented by Marlow, should be considered as part of his racial representation in the novel, as well as Gentleman Brown's. What I want to propose here is that Jewel's voice constitutes a warning of Jim's dark side. She knows there is something about Jim that she does not like, which makes it hard for her to fully trust him. As Phelan reminds us, Jewel qualifies as another sign of instability in the novel, for "although they live and work together with mutual devotion and love, and although both Jim and Marlow assure her that Jim will never leave, Jewel's fear cannot be assuaged" (51). However, her voice is silenced and subdued by racial prejudice. If she is saying this, Marlow assures the audience, it is because of her origins and previous experience with white men, and not because she understands anything. Ultimately, Jewel's voice is rejected as an adequate, thoughtful and reliable witness, very much in line with London's reading of Marlow's exertion of his narrative authority in

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<sup>142</sup> Watt points to Stein's episode as a way of transition to the Patusan section in narrative terms, and also as the introduction of romanticism in both meanings, that of the adventurous hero and that of the idealist. For him, Marlow and Stein are not preoccupied with the same question: "Stein has not resolved either the internal contradictions between Marlow's diverse allegiances, or his puzzlement about Jim; and so at the end Marlow falls back on the code of solidarity" (331).

<sup>143</sup> Linda M. Shires, "The 'privileged' reader and narrative methodology in *Lord Jim*." *Conradiana* 17.1 (1985): 26.

relation to the Intended in *Heart of Darkness*, since by “discrediting the Intended, Marlow bolsters his own credibility, ensuring his position as the one authorized reader of Kurtz’s life. The sole possessor of Kurtz’s last words, Marlow controls the meaning and circulation of Kurtz’s voice” (35). This should be considered therefore as a signal of Marlow’s distortion of narrative.

Gentlemen Brown’s narrative is selected by Marlow to tell him the rest of the story. His point of view is highly unreliable from Marlow’s perspective as well as ours, yet Marlow’s telling follows it instead of other Patusani witnesses. His voice has the function of illuminating the racial barrier between white and ‘the other,’ as well as of parodying Marlow’s unreliable choice of informants, as we shall see later.

Therefore, several factors in the novel compel the reader to distance himself from Marlow’s narration and to find in him the moral doubt that he insists surrounds Jim. Jim’s duplicity of character, Marlow’s highly connoted and judgmental narrative, and the existence of multiple, contrasting—yet internal—narrative voices suggest Jim’s story and character might have alternative readings. Thus, Marlow’s sympathy for Jim involves him in a performative act of persuasion the intensity of which is emphasized in the novel by means of indicators of his narrative discordance in his compelling interpretation of Jim. Indeed, Jim’s staggering footprints can be followed in the narrative through the profoundly ambivalent voice of Marlow.

Notwithstanding, intense as the process of persuasion is, Marlow’s unflinching pursuit of the Truth leads him to acknowledge the shortcomings of his own telling. As Jacques Berthoud asserts:

What the concept of positive illusion allows Marlow to do is to survive tragic knowledge without incurring [I would add, “full”] self-deception—that is to say, to affirm the values of the active life without blurring his sense of its underlying contradictions. But it is more than the culminating idea of an extraordinary complex and concentrated work of fiction. It is also one of the central preoccupations of the major works of the first half of Conrad’s career as a novelist, enabling him to do full justice to the paradoxes within his own nature—to his urge towards scepticism and to his need for faith.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Jacques Berthoud, “Heart of Darkness.” *Marlow* 97.

By way of conclusion, we could assert that *Lord Jim* addresses the problem of reliability through the modulation of narrative voice. The novel sets a narrative enigma based on what Marlow perceives as Jim's secret, in order to direct the unfolding of the plot, thus creating a nub around which many perspectives develop, though most of them remain subordinated to a principal one. This modern approach to the story efficiently works as a system of ripples, where voices give birth to new internal ones, in a sophisticated use of narrative levels. Before the distress generated by a recurring doubt, Marlow's embracing voice gets to the heart of the enigma through a highly persuasive narrative, which re-enacts the trajectory of his friendship with Jim. On the one hand, Marlow's partial knowledge makes him a fallible narrator, because he can only partially relate the story and the person of Jim, which is consistent with Marlow's reflections about human epistemological problems and the incapacity of language to communicate experience. On the other hand, however, and perhaps precisely because of the aforementioned limitations in storytelling, he engages in a process of strong narrative persuasion. There are declared motives in his narrative that significantly predetermine this process: he aims to clarify the validity of our standard of conduct and is trying to demonstrate that, ultimately and in spite of everything, Jim is 'one of us.' Thus, Marlow does not adopt this mode of narration arbitrarily, but rather out of the necessity to protect, up to certain point, the beliefs imperilled by the doubt. Repeatedly, the novel emphasizes Marlow's persuasion by means of textual indicators. These signs generally refer to Jim's confusing identity, and likewise point out that the reading of a collective identity in Jim is equally discordant in Marlow's account. In this sense, what is apparently only a narration that lacks sufficient information is gradually unveiled to be a narrative of conviction. Nonetheless, Marlow's process of persuasion reports its own failure, since Marlow acknowledges until the very end that he cannot get rid of the doubt, and thus that he cannot solve the "vast enigma." In this sense, his own narrative provides a critical perspective that contributes, along with several other signs, to restoring the doubt as central and invites a rereading of the novel that conceives of his account as a persuasive though ambivalent rendering of Jim's story. The complex mechanism of simultaneously developing a story according to a directed view and questioning it enacts the narrative strategy of the human doubt of the Modern subject. It shapes the transitional space between fixed standards of values, or beliefs, and the unstable Modern world. Furthermore, in the case of Joseph Conrad—

as well as that of William Faulkner—the complex doubt of the subject does not only deal with individual concerns and behaviours but also with collective ones, which can be historically traced, and which enable a fuller comprehension of Marlow’s bewilderment. As we will see, *Lord Jim*’s voices of persuasion greatly affect racial representation in the novel, and manage to incarnate historical debates, establishing a neat correlation between narrative and historical ambivalence.

### 3. NARRATING STEREOTYPES: THE FICTION OF THE EXOTIC AND THE RACIAL MIRROR

Coincidences in life sometimes astonish by appearing as “figura,” as Erich Auerbach’s understands this concept. In Auerbach’s view, “figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. The two poles of the figure are separate in time, but both, being real events or figures, are within time, within the stream of historical life. Only the understanding of the two persons or events is a spiritual act, but this spiritual act deals with concrete events whether past, present, or future, and not with concepts or abstractions.”<sup>145</sup> Thus, a figura announces an event that will take form in the future but that cannot be foreseen in the present. Sometimes, this figura is a corpus of works or a person which discloses the emotional features of a whole *Zeitgeist*. Joseph Conrad’s memory of his shipmaster’s examination contains a detail which reveals a coincidence that can be read as a figura of his whole future work and authorship: “I am of the year 1857,” he tells his examiner; “The Mutiny year,” he clarified.<sup>146</sup>

From the perspective of the idea this chapter intends to convey, this coincidence is striking. But, it is even more remarkable if we join to this date David Livingstone’s publication of his bestseller *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*. The conjunction of these three elements in Joseph Conrad’s life accounts for the complex perception of the individual and the immediate historical context in his work. The Indian Mutiny was a turning point which radically altered British Imperial self-perceptions. In 1857, colonial dominion proved to be as fragile as its avowed civilizing mission appeared hollow. The sepoys revolt marked the starting point of an increasing feeling of bewilderment and doubt about the nature of British imperial power, brought to the surface in the guise of a racialisation of the Victorian society, as we shall see. On the other hand, Dr. Livingstone had just discovered Lake Victoria, thus redrawing the map of Africa colouring more of its blank spaces in red, and announcing a golden era of

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<sup>145</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, c1984, 53.

<sup>146</sup> Joseph Conrad, *A personal record*. New York. Doubleday: Page & Company, 1924, 118.

further prospecting of unknown exotic lands. His *Missionary Travels* supplied the paradigm for a genre of historical heroes who sustained the noble spirit of the explorers and colonizers, and became the energizing narrative of the adventure novel when it first met the rift between historical evidence and literary moods. Dr. Livingstone's narratives reinvigorated the old spirit of the imperial heroes, which endured and engaged the propagandistic discourse of the Empire by the end of the century. Livingstone's stories are very often assumed to be the main source for the pattern of the adventure novel, which finds little dissident in the fictionalization of the debates of the times. It is precisely in this sense that we can envision Conrad's life and work, sailing along a somehow parallel course which tries to find a balance between an idealistic image of the Englishman beyond the metropolitan shores and his unstable stand in historical terms. If we add to this the questioning of the modern subject in his or her psychological world, we fathom the complexity and ambivalence of Conrad's work in regards to the individual, especially the English one in the far reaches of Empire, in a way that impressively condenses the spirit of the times.

The racialisation of Victorian society is the product of these uncertainties and moral debates over domestic social problems, about the model of the Englishman or—to use another term of the age—the Anglo-Saxon, and the role of the colonizers. While most of the adventure novel tradition reproduces imperial propaganda built upon a solid racial hierarchy without hesitation, Conrad's literature followed another direction—along with other writers—which combines in a single novel the adventure tradition with the modern novel. Furthermore, he introduces in the interrogative narrative method of Modern literature historical debates which are coincident in its inquiring attitude yet have a distinct political underpinning.

Conrad adopts, amongst other features of the genre, a contemporary racial perspective of these issues, since he assumes most of the racial stereotypes codified in imperial discourse and the adventure novel. Nevertheless, he manages to transform some of their narrative functions in order to absorb the crisis of the hero in the British Empire.

Thus, my study of racial stereotypes in Conrad's *Lord Jim* will emphasize the narrative functions of racial stereotypes with the aim of

providing a new focus for the study of racial representation in literature, as I have previously argued. I will analyze the stereotypes of the Exotic, the English gentleman, the Pilgrims, the Malay and the half-castes, as well as the generic paradigm of the adventure novel, to show not only how these moulds are described—in line with existing criticism—but mainly how they are used as modern narrative strategies internal to a specific work of art.

### 3. 1. The fiction of the Exotic

The widely quoted contemporary reviewer of *Almayer's Folly* in the *Spectator* speculated that Conrad “might become the Kipling of the Malay Archipelago.”<sup>147</sup> Conrad’s longstanding categorization in the history of literature as an imperial romance writer, not only by critics but also by his own readers, is not entirely without merit in light of certain features that point to his affinity with this popular late nineteenth century genre.<sup>148</sup> One of them is his liking for exoticism. Conrad’s often-misunderstood depiction of exotic settings has obscured the quality of his writing from the eyes of literary critics. The simplification process that exoticism entails and its highly codified role in the tradition of the adventure novel has earned condemnation of the writer’s lack of sophistication that, though no doubt true in many other cases, Conrad’s work does not merit. His use of the exotic is, on the one hand, deeply indebted to his own literary tradition of representation of the “East,” and colonial spaces in general, and, on the other hand, stands out as a new terrain of narrative exploration to illuminate the nature of human perspective and experience of life.

The exotic setting in *Lord Jim* is concentrated in the so-called second part of the novel, which concerns the events in Patusan. In the Norton Critical Edition of *Lord Jim*, accompanying Marlow’s appeal to the audience in the opening of chapter XXI—“I don’t suppose any of you have ever heard of Patusan?”—, is a footnote that explains the sources for this fictional country: “Geographically speaking, Conrad had in mind the Teunom River area on the northwest coast of

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<sup>147</sup> Collected in Norman Sherry, *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, 61.

<sup>148</sup> See the interesting section “Publicity” for contemporary ways of advertising Conrad’s works in John G. Peters, ed., *Conrad in the Public Eye*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008.

Sumatra. For specific details, however, Conrad was using the Berau delta he personally knew in Dutch East Borneo” (132). A description to which Robert Hampson adds that “Patusan in *Lord Jim* takes its name from the fortified village in west Borneo near the confluence of the Sakarran River with the Batang Lupar, which was destroyed by James Brooke in 1844 during his campaign to suppress piracy.”<sup>149</sup> Though Patusan is made up of the fragments of Conrad’s experience in the Malay Archipelago, its description has been rightly pointed out to be closer to the adventure novel tradition than to the particular landscape of Borneo. This is because the landscape or the description of the setting does not aim to be either objective or accurate, rather, it is filtered by Marlow’s lyricism. Lyricism, though remarkable throughout Marlow’s discourse, is highly condensed in this section of the novel. It is precisely this intense poetic character of the setting which, nourished by the colonial literary tradition, offers a vision of impassioned exoticism.

Conrad’s exoticism functions in several ways to convey to the reader Marlow’s perspective on life and his Promethean efforts to understand human conduct. Many chapters ahead, in the ‘raj’ of Patusan, Marlow’s contemplation of the night is extremely revealing of his telling:

He spoke thus to me before his house on that evening I’ve mentioned—after we had watched the moon float away above the chasm between the hills like an ascending spirit out of a grave; its sheen descended, cold and pale, like the ghost of dead sunlight. There is something haunting in the light of the moon; it has all the dispassionateness of a disembodied soul, and something of its inconceivable mystery. It is to our sunshine which—say what you like—is all we have to live by, what the echo is to the sound: misleading and confusing whether the note be mocking or sad. (148)

Marlow establishes the opposition between moonlight and sunshine that is common to the representation of colonial settings: the domain of the moon is the dark, colonial space while the domain of the sun is the illuminated civilized world, that of the colonizer. Two worlds are clearly portrayed in opposition in order to offer the absence/presence feature of the stereotype as defined by Homi Bhabha. In this case, the

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<sup>149</sup> Robert Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad’s Malay Fiction*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2002, 14. Further reference to the historical setting will be made below.

opposition between the obscurity of the night and “our” sunshine is explicit. The realm of the pale, cold and haunting light of the moon is the reign of the “inconceivable mystery” of the disembodied soul, yet only an unsettling shadow, a distortion of the unity of body and soul visible in daylight. This is the mystery of life which has been repeatedly referred to in Marlow’s narrative when he tries to approach Jim’s enigmatic personality, and which has been expressed by Marlow’s indication of its ineffability. Not only is the moonlight a metaphor for the mystery of life, but its antithetical relation to the sunshine is further elaborated by the simile of the relation between the echo and the sound. These rhetorical figures of speech give a tone akin to poetry to Marlow’s narration of the exotic setting. There is a double metaphor working in this passage that is repeated throughout the Patusan part of the novel. First, there is the substituting object of the exotic space and the substituted one of the mystery of life (here we find them explicit, though we should go back to the many times the moon and the night is referred in Marlow’s discourse); and secondly, there is another metaphor proper to the working of the stereotype: the moonlight by negative implication highlights the sunshine. This denotation of an absence is enriched by the first mentioned metaphor, for the sunshine is to certainty what moonlight is to mystery. These two levels of reality established by the multiple contrasting terms or realms of the metaphor, articulated by the stereotype of the exotic, correspond to the world of the colonized and the world of the colonizer respectively, as we shall see afterwards.

Going back to the simile of the moonlight being to sunshine what the echo is to the sound, our attention is drawn to sound, to voice, to language. The echo is “misleading and confusing whether the note be mocking or sad,” for there is not an exact reproduction of the real sound but something that comes back confused and confusing, from an unspecified and invisible source. The world of Patusan, of the exotic, is the world of the echo, of the negative shapelessness, confusion, though it is sustained by a defined material counterpart. This is also a metaphor for Marlow’s voice that in its way back from this exotic mysterious world adopts the texture of an echo. Marlow’s tone is to his audience and readers as misleading and confusing as the echo of a sound, and has the very intimate peculiarity of appearing mocking and sad at the same time. Marlow’s simultaneous distancing from and approach to Jim is communicated through a too often

double-sided tone, misleading and confusing, a result of his groping telling.

Hence, Marlow's depiction of Patusan following the tradition of the stereotypical exoticism of imperial romance is his narrative strategy designed to place in the story itself the origin of the rhetorical mode of his voice in the telling. His experience of the Exotic is the experience of the shadow of human being and the mystery of life. Such an experience breeds the doubt about oneself and his world, which is embodied in Marlow's mature perspective of Jim as well as it is in his perspective of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Jim is incomprehensible, yet his incomprehensibility emerges in the telling of the outlook of an older man that retells the story of Jim, in each subsequent telling doing so more obscurely, more hesitatingly.

As we are going to see, racial stereotypes of whiteness identify the latter with the positive pole of the human spectrum, wholeness, and materiality, while racial stereotypes that represent the other races suggest or explicitly refer to the "lack" mentioned by Bhabha. This is why racial stereotypes of the Other, even when condescending toward individuals of "other races" are usually fixed as negative portrayals that are very limited and incomplete, always general, as vague and fading as the echo. Marlow creates this atmosphere of the Other world with references to incompleteness such as "disembodied," "dispassionateness," "inconceivable," in an Eastern moonlight that "robs all forms of matter—which, after all, is our domain—of their substance, and gives a sinister reality to shadows alone." The mocking tone comes back again in this confusion between irony and sadness: "And the shadows were very real around us" (148). These shadows point at not only the shadows produced by the darkness of the night but at the inhabitants, the distinct subjects themselves who sleep around them peacefully, which in turn establishes a connection with the sleeping pilgrims of the *Patna* in a transformation of a previous image.

In the sequence of metaphors that hold together the European literary tradition the Exotic stands for Hades or Inferno, the world of the Dead. As David Adams observes in his perceptive *Colonial Odysseys: Empire and Epic in the Modernist Novel*, after recalling in his introduction the widely acknowledged and extensively analyzed borrowing of the epic genre by the imperial literature, "throughout the epic tradition,

the descent to Hell has served as a way for the epic adventurer (and the artist) to confront his dead predecessors and work through his relationship to them. When this process is most successful, it expresses something of the arrogance of the living in relation to the dead.”<sup>150</sup>

From the very beginning, Marlow introduces Patusan through this highly symbolic language insisting on its semantic link with Death: “He [Jim] left his earthly failing behind him”(132) and went to Patusan, “I can only guess that once before Patusan had been used as a grave for some sin” (133), “Once he got in, it would be for the outside world as though he had never existed” (140), in the quoted passage the moon is “like an ascending spirit out of a grave” (148). These images are accompanied by colors related to darkness and moonlight that are attributed to the absence of life, to silence, to stillness, to isolation from the Earth: “All was silent, still; even on the river the moonbeams slept as on a pool. The houses crowding along the wide shinning sweep without ripple or glitter, stepping into the water in a line of jostling, vague, grey, silvery forms mingled with black masses of shadow, were like a spectral herd of shapeless creatures pressing forward to drink in a spectral and lifeless stream” (149). This hidden place, Patusan, between “two steep hills very close together, and separated by what looks like a deep fissure, the cleavage of some mighty stroke” (133) is traversed by a stream as spectral and lifeless as the Leteo river of the Inferno where the dead “drink” in order to forget their previous lives. Marlow’s intense use of the imagery of the Inferno to describe the exotic setting, in contrast to the “western,” “white” colonizer’s world is not new in imperial literature. Patrick Brantlinger asserts in his acclaimed *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*, when reconstructing the Genealogy of the Myth of the “Dark Continent,” that “even at its most positive the romance genre renders the hero’s quest as a journey to an underworld, a harrowing of hell, and into this pattern the myth of the Dark Continent fits perfectly.”<sup>151</sup> From this journey to the underworld, two variants in particular are commonly developed in the genre Adams

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<sup>150</sup> David Adams, *Colonial Odysseys: Empire and Epic in the Modernist Novel*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2003, 145.

<sup>151</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1988, 193. See also the collection of essays on literature and the late Victorian Empire, Robert Giddings, ed., *Literature and Imperialism*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991.

calls “colonial odysseys” or modern colonial travel narratives, highly influenced by their classical precedent:

[When this process is most successful] The encounters with predecessors are necessary, in other words, not only to acknowledge a debt but also to create a certain distance. In each of these cases, the descent enables the living adventurer to map a path “home,” and eventually each reaches a home that marks his distance from the dead predecessor . . . . Thus a successful encounter with the dead produces prophecy, giving the adventurer (and the reader) a glimpse of the future as well as the past. When the working through is less successful, however, Hades becomes an image for a haunting past and offers no vision of the future—it suggests, indeed, the human history is at an end. . . . The living wanderer is unable to distance predecessors, unable to escape the shadow of the dead, unable to capture the arrogance of the living. (146)

Adams analyzes this pattern in *Heart of Darkness*, especially the unsuccessful descent to the Inferno, where Kurtz occupies the space of a God in a complex and disoriented Modern world where the theological vision has been substituted for new visions projected into the colonial world.<sup>152</sup> From Adams’ perspective, in *Heart of Darkness* the descents of both Kurtz and Marlow do not succeed because Kurtz cannot come back, and Marlow discovers that “the tumult of the dead is no longer something that can be forgotten on earth or sealed off from the earth” and therefore Marlow “consistently incorporates Europe into the Inferno” (147).

The same pattern can be distinguished in *Lord Jim*, where Jim’s jump constitutes the deed that reveals that Hell also inhabits the colonizer’s world. However, the Hades or Inferno trope is doubly at work in *Lord Jim*, maybe less ostensibly than in *Heart of Darkness*, though the latter could also be considered also from this perspective: in Jim’s quest “there could be no going back” (160), for he was in “captivity” (160), “Jim the leader was a captive in every sense. The land, the people, the

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<sup>152</sup> The process of reoccupation of the colonial space is a central aspect of Adams’s thesis. From his point of view, the importance of the motif of Hades or Inferno is much more impressive and functional in *Heart of Darkness* than in *Lord Jim*. “While the underworld imagery in *Lord Jim* could have been drawn largely from pagan Hades, *Heart of Darkness* is closer in spirit to Dante’s Inferno; the focus shifts, in other words, from shades to demons. Virgil knew well the cruelty and violence that accompany imperial power, but it is the Christian God whom Kurtz ironically—unsuccessfully, abominably—replaces.” (145)

friendship, the love, were like jealous guardians of his body” (157); whereas Marlow does go back home, thus completing the circle and adhering to the traditional pattern of the descent to the underground, to take up the position of a privileged, wise observer of life, which bestows on Marlow’s *Bildungsroman* the capacity of acknowledging the uncomfortable but inherent mist of life. In this light, Jim’s quest would be unsuccessful because, even though his immensity has granted him a splendid fame in Patusan, Brierly’s suggestion of Jim’s burial has been accomplished for “once he got in, it would be for the outside world as though he had never existed” (140); meanwhile, Marlow’s quest is complete because he comes back home, another motif of the travel narratives in general and Odysseys in particular, the significance of which for both the colonizer and the individual Marlow deliberately insists upon in the opening chapter of Patusan (XXI). Marlow reflects:

I was going home—to that home distant enough for all its hearthstones to be like one hearthstone, by which the humblest of us has the right to sit. We wander in our thousands over the face of the earth, the illustrious and the obscure, earning beyond the seas our fame, our money, or only a crust of bread; but it seems to me that for each of us going home must be like going to render an account. We return to face our superiors, our kindred, our friends—those whom we obey, and those whom we love; but even they who have neither, the most free, lonely, irresponsible and bereft of ties, —even those for whom home holds no dear face, no familiar voice, —even they have to meet the spirit that dwells within the land, under its sky, in its air, its valleys, and on its rises, in its fields, in its waters and its trees—a mute friend, judge, and inspirer. Say what you like, to get its joy, to breathe its peace, to face its truth, one must return with a clear conscience. (134)

Somehow, Jim’s consciousness of his situation impedes his return, though Jim deserves Marlow’s admiration and effort at redemption, which goes against the “rotten state” of “the country... not ripe for interference” (140) through the endless telling and retelling of Jim’s story to the outer world. Marlow’s deep fascination with Jim, though always overshadowed by his jump from the *Patna*, might originate from the fact that he has become a hero in this native country in what Marlow himself qualifies as an “immense” achievement that closely follows the tradition of the imperial romance. In the latter genre, the principal danger to be overcome by the ideal hero is that of “going native,” which has Kurtz as Conrad’s outstanding protagonist, as here

Jim does, for even his impeccable white clothes remain the same over the years.<sup>153</sup>

The journey to the colonial world entwines both the moral individual self and her/his contemporary defiance of immersion in the distant territories of the Empire, since “the narrative of the journey” presents “three questions articulated by the text: whether there is any redeeming idea behind colonialism; what becomes of the mercenary in the wilderness; and what becomes of the moral man in the wilderness,” as Robert Hampson writes in relation to *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>154</sup>

Exoticism, therefore, is used to locate Hell, and thus to describe the journey both to self-knowledge and to the prohibited dimensions of life, to the world of the Dead. Adams concludes his own thesis observing that

The collapse of boundaries between worlds and the resulting pervasiveness of hell partially account for the similarities between home and colony, but *Heart of Darkness* still uses the conflation of epic episode and imperial setting to project the source of domestic anxieties onto Africa. Just as “Karain” and *Lord Jim* transferred to the Malay Archipelago Britain’s discontent with its own rites of memory and mourning, so *Heart of Darkness* transfers its discontent to King Leopold’s Congo. (148)

The choice of the imperial space as a metaphorical setting for Hades or Inferno bursts into the narrative as the violent imposition of a duality of meaning which involves many characteristics of the place and its inhabitants that bear a remarkable resemblance to codified popular stereotypes of races other than white. The metaphor of the Exotic as Hell powerfully reinforces racial stereotypes in narrative texts, for “the racism of Conrad’s tale results from this superimposition of epic and imperial geography” (Adams 148), which is common in many adventure novels. However, Adams argues that the introduction of the Inferno *topoi* is a cue to question the standards of culture, “our” supposedly rational and enlightened nature in a

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<sup>153</sup> The most remarkable account of the concept of ‘going native,’ which includes a chapter on Conrad focused on Kurtz, is Marianna Torgovnick’s *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1990.

<sup>154</sup> Robert Hampson, *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992, 109.

process of self-recognition that discovers the secret mist of life, its mysterious and dark side. Not only this, but it questions the whole ideal discourse of civilization and whiteness developed in the nineteenth century, as we are going to see explored in more detail when analyzing other stereotypes in *Lord Jim*.

While the fiction of the exotic should be claimed as a narrative strategy that very skillfully intrudes in the imaginary of its late Victorian readers, who in turn activate its colonial discourse at the moment of its maximum aggressiveness to illuminate the darkness of life and the individual psychology; nonetheless, this feature of artistic description is a reference to colonial discourse itself that ought not to be neglected. Taking the inverse approach to my own, Benita Parry introduces the point where Conrad's fictions take sides in the transition from collective colonial discourse to the discourse of the modern subject:

But when western mores are in conflict with alien structures of experience, the contest is differently articulated and the outcome ideologically determined. Although ethic solipsism is interrogated and domestic moral axioms deprived of their supremacy, because the other hemisphere *does* represent 'the other,' the fictions effectively intercede to decide the contest between two cultures as if these represented two equal moral universes. Thus even as the fictions rescue from denigration or neglect those notions and goals that are opposed to western norms, the antinomies between the West and Asia/Africa/Latin America, or between North and South, are ultimately transmuted as the antagonism between Ego and Id, Reason and the Irrational, Consciousness and the Unconscious, the Performance Principle and the Pleasure Principle, and in this context the contrary aspirations of instinctual renunciation and gratification, initiative and passivity, innovation and quietism, action and world-negation which were enacted as genuine options within a tradition, become a combat where the values of the white world must assert themselves against the negation of civilization itself and resist the annihilation of authentic human purpose.<sup>155</sup>

Exoticism functions as a way to describe the colonized subjects at the same time as it discusses, by the substitutive process of racial stereotypes that Bhabha suggests, the metropolis' own domestic

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<sup>155</sup> Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers*. London and Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1983, 4.

problems. Douglas A. Lorimer in *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, and Patrick Brantlinger in *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism (1830-1914)* brilliantly juxtapose the domestic historical context with racial discourse, and historical context with British imperial literature. Both build up the use and the flexibility and fixity of stereotypes all along the nineteenth century, with special attention to its second half.<sup>156</sup>

Stereotypes are flexible in the sense that they are used, combined and modified according to the particular context of the discourse of the speaker, who will portray the Other, colonized or not, within the framework of his or her intentions and attitudes. This means that the codification of stereotypes is logically much more simplifying and abstract than reality or concrete circumstances. Yet historical events or contexts need to be known when discussing stereotypes, since the use of these forms is intimately linked to their meanings in the present of the narrative. In spite of this, stereotypes have historically been transplanted somehow freely from one context to the other. This is what Lorimer argues when he describes that the extent to which mid and late Victorian stereotypes of Africans were deeply indebted in their codification to the contemporary American debate over slavery, immediately prior to and during the American Civil War (1850-1865).<sup>157</sup> If this is an example of the complex origins of the fixation of racial stereotypes—of course, it is part of a longer process with peaks in historical events of impact that define the blurred lines of the drawings—it is not surprising to find that, as a result of its relative abstraction, the myth of the Dark Continent was loosely applied to other contexts, whether Malay, Indian or Caribbean.

*Lord Jim* inscribes in the fiction the myth of the Dark Continent—yet in a much subtler way than *Heart of Darkness*—as much as for its insistent contrasts of white and black, light and darkness, or its

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<sup>156</sup> Douglass A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*. Leicester: Leicester UP; New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978. To see the relevance of the influence of the British imperialism in the domestic context, see also Catherine Hall, *Civilising subjects: colony and metropole in the English imagination*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002. See also the more general study, Andrew Thomson's *The Empire strikes back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the mid-nineteenth century*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2005.

<sup>157</sup> See also Catherine Bolt's comparisons in this sense in *Victorian Attitudes to Race*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1971.

depiction of Patusan's inhabitants, as for its metaphorical references to Hell. Brantlinger points to the myth's origins:

By the 1860's the success of the antislavery movement, the impact of the great Victorian explorers, and the merger in the social sciences of racist and evolutionary doctrines had combined, and the public widely shared a view of Africa which demanded imperialization on moral, religious, and scientific grounds. It is this view I call the myth of the Dark Continent. (174)

In the wake of bitter defeats for the European participants in the conquest of Africa, including disease and death which plagued the Niger Expedition (1841), the progressive decline of missionary work, and the development of the pseudoscientific racist theories, but also due to internal crisis and domestic tensions resulting from changes in social composition and relative class immobility, the myth of the Dark Continent by the end of the century condensed all the symptoms of decadence and degeneration. As Brantlinger puts it: "By the time of the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, which is often identified as the start of the Scramble for Africa, the British tended to see Africa as a center of evil, a part of the world possessed by a demonic darkness or barbarism, represented above all by slavery, human sacrifice, and cannibalism, which it was their duty to exorcise" (179).

If this unequivocally suits *Heart of Darkness*, the myth of the Dark Continent is conveyed through similar though mitigated symbolism in *Lord Jim*. References to evil, to darkness, to barbarism, and to atrocities are confirmed to the reader in Marlow's telling in the form of rumors from the area and from travelers: "It [Patusan] was referred to knowingly in the inner government circles in Batavia, especially as to its irregularities and aberrations" (132), it is "a grave for some sin" (133). Marlow is also informed that "utter insecurity for life and property was the normal condition" (138) and had become worse ever since the seventeenth century heyday of the pepper trade, with the passing of which "the glory has departed" (137). Patusan, increasingly distant from the interests of mankind and from "earthly importance", has therefore degenerated into continuous strife and brutality ("there wasn't a week without some fight in Patusan at the time", 153; "Patusan—they cut throats there—no business of ours", 167).<sup>158</sup> This

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<sup>158</sup> Another example of Patusan's constant violence is found in chapter XXVII: "There was the making of a sanguinary shindy in the thing. Every bally idiot took

Exotic Dark setting is populated by racial stereotypes instead of individuals, flat characters that are impressively cut out from racial discourse, scarcely possessing any vitality, as silent and still as wax figures. Of course, these stereotypes are used for the narrative purposes we are going to examine.

Exoticism in Conrad's *Lord Jim* is elaborated as a narrative strategy that strengthens its modernity at the same time as it preserves the colonial discourse. Such an 'exoticized' setting as Marlow's Patusan achieves the objective of subscribing to the trope of the descent to Hades through the cultural imagery it conveys in the orientalist minds of late Victorians, helping create its gloomy, dead atmosphere. Since this symbolic territory works as a metaphor for mystery, for the side of the subject that remains hidden to reason and certainty—that elusive side of the mind that Freud explored and that shaped the concerns of the Modern subject to a point that defined its idiosyncrasy—we can understand the elaboration of a traditional motif to suit a new Modern panorama. Marlow's broken voice, in order to communicate a fragmented, frail modern perception of a changing world where the individual identity is menaced and disoriented by its anonymous placement in it, finds its way of utterance through its passage along the interior regions of the Earth, as well as through its internal recoil into the obscure depths of the ocean of the self. This is the space where Marlow's personal crying voice finds its echo, a reminder of the complexity of existence and the enigmatic nature of alienation. Marlow's experience of Patusan provides the texture of his voice in his distressing retelling, a voice that as a result of its balanced yet unsettling placement between alienation and commitment necessarily informs a misleading tone between mockery and sadness. In Conrad's work, henceforth, exoticism cannot be regarded only as a topical feature of the imperial novel but also as an elaboration of a traditional referent to incarnate the main concern of the modern self.

Nonetheless, however suitable the Hades *topoi* might be, its representation throughout the exotic colonial space at the same time links the novel to Conrad's only literary tradition of the representation of the colonial territories, that of the adventure novel. Marlow's

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sides with one family or the other, and one-half of the village was ready to go for the other half with anything that came handy" (161). This sinful and criminal colonial territory ironically owes much of its codifying to the conflictive population of convicts expelled from the metropolis to its most distant lands, above all Australia.

symbolic description benefits so much from the connotations that the racial stereotypes convey to an audience so familiar with them, that its effect functions not only to illuminate a contemporary perception of the world but it reinforces the official, established standpoint that refers not so much to the individual identity but to the collective one, constructed upon racial and national discourses throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, Marlow's awareness of his telling of a "heroic tale," for which an exotic and quickly recognizable Patusan is drawn, contributes immensely to the redemption of Jim's failure and to restoring the colonized world to its comforting position of inferiority in relation to the civilized.

Patusan works in *Lord Jim* as an efficient setting quite like that of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* where, in order to suggest European devils,

He paints Kurtz and Africa with the same tarbrush. His version of evil—the form taken by Kurtz's Satanic behavior—is going native. Evil, in short, *is* African in Conrad's story; if it is also European, that is because some white men in the heart of darkness behave like Africans. Conrad's stress on cannibalism, his identification of African customs with violence, lust, and madness, his metaphors of bestiality, death, and darkness, his suggestion that traveling in Africa is like traveling backward in time to primaver, infantile, but also hellish stages of existence—these features of the story are drawn from the repertoire of Victorian imperialism and racism that painted an entire continent dark. (Brantlinger 262)

Yet the paradox of the instability of our statements and standards of conduct remains within the particular motif of the Exotic in this novel, questioning the certainties of the individual identity at the same time as it reinforces the racial and national collective ones. Exoticism itself is an example of the ambivalence of the stereotype when we provide the substituted reality the abstract form is referring to—Patusan as a fictional place yet also supposed to match particular objective features of the Malay Archipelago, and indebted of Conrad's personal knowledge of Borneo—, which produces the violent contrast of the distance between the abstraction of the colonial discourse and the concreteness of reality, condoned by the freedom of fiction that Brantlinger suggests. But the ambivalence of this stereotypical setting is much more sophisticated for it entails a blending of languages and discourses that appear to be contradictory. Conrad's use of the stereotype as a narrative strategy works to fuse in its double function

the contradiction of his historical moment: it refers to the narrative problem of telling and comprehending the individual, and it simultaneously perpetuates the traditional fixed literary image of the colonial setting. This may be perceived as well in the use of other stereotypes that populate the story.

### **3. 2. Jim as an English gentleman at the heart of the enigma**

*Lord Jim* confronts whiteness and the fixed British and Western standards of conduct through the narrative elaboration of the stereotype of the English gentleman. Indeed, as Allan Simmons suggests, “the protocols of professional and social inclusion examined in *Lord Jim*, through the respective subjects of maritime conduct and the English gentleman-adventurer, are freighted with political and personal anxieties.”<sup>159</sup> The conventions of professional and social inclusion are also racial, as Simmons is aware too. It is precisely the aim of this chapter to expose the complex presentation of these anxieties.

What has been labeled the “New Imperialism,” or just “Imperialism,” benefited from several propagandistic means to disseminate a discourse that would manage to keep faith in the British Empire, the legitimacy of which enterprise had been eroded through the several aforementioned upheavals. As John Mackenzie explains,

It is possible to identify an ideological cluster which formed out of the intellectual, national, and world-wide conditions of the later Victorian era, and which came to infuse and be propagated by every organ of British life in the period. It was made up of a renewed militarism, a devotion to royalty, an identification and worship of national heroes, together with a contemporary cult of personality, and racial ideas associated with Social Darwinism. Together these constituted a new type of patriotism, which derived a special significance from Britain’s unique imperial mission. That the mission was unique in scale was apparent to all. That it was also unique in its moral content was one of the principal propagandist points of the age. Empire had the power to regenerate not only the ‘backward’ world, but also the British themselves, to raise them from the gloom and apprehension of the

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<sup>159</sup> Allan H. Simmons, *Joseph Conrad*. Critical issues series. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006, 100.

later nineteenth century, and by creating a national purpose with a high moral content lead to class conciliation.<sup>160</sup>

In this imperial enterprise, the shaping of the figure of the English gentleman was indispensable to the blending of the racial, social, and economic perspectives that involved the dynamics of the territories within and beyond metropolitan borders. As a matter of fact, it is my contention that the stereotype of the English gentleman should be regarded as the main reference to racial discourse in this novel, much more so than the colonized world itself, for reasons we are going to explore in the following pages. This interpretation does not neglect the importance of the representation of the Other in the narrative; on the contrary, as explained in the introduction, by placing it on the same level that Conrad and Marlow have assigned to it, its principal “fonction constructive” is illuminated. “Gentlemanliness” in its fixity as a stereotypical form is the key element that, confronted with the fictional reality impersonated by Jim, shows the instability of British collective identities. A historical contextualization of the English gentleman is required at this point to understand the narrative working of this stereotype in *Lord Jim*.<sup>161</sup>

From Lorimer’s study on the process by which English society moved from ethnocentrism to racialism, it is clear that some of the principal

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<sup>160</sup> John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984, 2. This study is crucial to understanding the nature and power of the imperialist discourse in late Victorian society. See also for the imperial propaganda, Thomas G. August, *The Selling of the Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890-1940*. Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1985.

<sup>161</sup> My historical sketch of the gentleman here focuses mainly on its definition in relation to the imperial enterprise and domestic racial concerns. However, it is worth noting an attempt at definition of this “social construct” in the first chapter of Christine Berberich’s acute and impressively documented recent book *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007). Such characteristics as refined manners, adherence to a standard of conduct, duty, appearance and intelligence are found in most contemporary opinions which reveal how “gentlemanliness” referred more to a social and cultural agreement, and so a category fit to become a stereotype, than to a particular, distinct objective fact (as for example a title). Berberich’s study is a clear introduction to the notion of the gentleman as well as to its historical and literary development. Berberich analyses the stereotype of the gentleman in the twentieth century focusing on its survival and its new interpretations and narrative functions in a manner that is surprisingly close to the perspective of this study, yet not concerned with racial issues or imperial implications of the stereotype.

stereotypes changed during the second half of the nineteenth century, among them the most important one is probably the stereotype of the “gentleman.”<sup>162</sup> Whereas most of the stereotypes of populations other than English normally found several fixed forms that might be even contradictory in some aspects—where the most divergent notions would probably be the noble savage and the threatening Negro—the idea of the gentleman was continually modified and redefined. It evolved from designating a social status that could be achieved by conforming to the conventions of correct upper-class behavior, regardless of the color of skin during the first half of the nineteenth century, to a later designation limited to whites only.<sup>163</sup> Prominent

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<sup>162</sup> Apart from Lorimer’s powerful argumentation, see also Robert Johnson’s chapter “Was the British Empire racialist or racist?” on the debate about the racialist or racist nature of the late nineteenth century British Empire, in his book *British Imperialism*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

<sup>163</sup> I cannot go more deeply into this crucial function of the gentleman and need to focus exclusively on the racial effect of the change, but I want to underline here that, in fact, this change in the definition of the gentleman does not only affect racial traits, for this is a particular outcome of a wider transition to an industrial and imperial Great Britain that had begun in the eighteenth century, as Robin Gilmour explains: “The danger is rather that in remembering only the harmful legacy, we forget the serious content in the gentlemanly idea and the civilising role it played in the genesis of Victorian Britain. For the idea of the gentleman is in fact one of the most important of Victorian notions, ‘the necessary link,’ as Asa Briggs says, ‘in any analysis of mid-Victorian ways of thinking and behaving.’ Hopkin’s ‘notion of a gentleman’ lay at the heart of the social and political accommodation between the aristocracy and the middle classes in the period, and was a powerful implicit assumption behind many of the characteristic reforms and innovations which were the fruit of that accommodation: the growth of the professions and of a professional class, the reforms of the Home and Indian Civil Services, the overhaul of the old public schools and the creation of the new, geared to the production of an administrative elite capable of serving and administering an increasingly complex industrial society and, later, an expanding empire.” (*The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981, 2). In addition, Disraeli’s ideas provide a remarkable window on the gulf between the ideal colonial gentleman and more playful figures, as David Bivona suggests, since, “Empire, in Disraeli’s view, fashions gentlemen of substance out of erstwhile parochial, bored aristocrats, thus providing a small measure of justification for the social and political privileges of a class which expends wealth but does not, in nineteenth-century eyes, seem to produce much of it. Tancred employs recognizably ‘middle-class’ character traits—renunciation of immediate gratification, devotion to ‘duty’—in the service of ‘higher’ goals than the purely material ones Disraeli associates with the objects of middle-class striving. However, these ‘higher goals’ ultimately amount to a kind of ‘motiveless’ playing at empire which finally threatens, in subterranean fashion, the cultural hierarchies it is meant to shore up.” (*Desire and contradiction: Imperial visions and*

black abolitionists of the first half of the century, for example, “in manner, in speech, in dress, in their own confidence and social ease, and even in their mental outlook, were eminently qualified, and therefore acceptable in the best circles of Victorian society” (52). Lorimer distinguishes between “ethnocentric” and “racist” or “racialised” societies: “The term ‘racist’ is best limited to those societies which see themselves superior by reason of their biological inheritance, whereas the more common ethnocentric assumption of cultural superiority still admits the possibility of the outsider conforming to the supposedly superior norm” (16). Lorimer takes the idea of the “gentleman” to reconstruct the historical path from the primarily ethnocentric Victorian society of the first half of the nineteenth century to the racialised one from the midcentury to its end. Throughout the 1860’s, these changes are perceptible in the English idea of the gentleman, which will be fixed up to the last decades of the century creating many outstanding literary figures such as Marlow or Jim:

At the same time, the standards of respectable mid-Victorians were changing. Those Englishmen interested in black improvement had demanded success in life and respectability in conduct from white and black alike. During the 1860s and after they added to this demand for respectability and success, the new and more rarified quality of gentility. By its very nature this quest for gentility proved more restrictive, for only a few could gain entrance into this élite rank of leadership and authority. Overseas, black communities had failed to conform even to respectable standards. . . . With the change in mid-Victorian attitudes, the colour of a man’s skin rather than his social accomplishments began to weigh heavier in the English assessment of individual blacks. The Victorians never seriously questioned the Negro’s capacity for physical labour. His supposed inferiority only applied to those positions filled by the upper and middle classes, or what Haliburton had styled the places of gentlemen. This change in attitude rested upon an extension of social attitudes already present in Victorian society to include racial differences. Once the assumption was made that blacks could only perform labouring tasks and never approach gentlemanly status, respectable Victorians simply applied to all men with black skins the same judgments, manner, and bearing that they adopted toward their social inferiors within English society. When this association between African descent and lowly social status became more firmly fixed, and was added to the latent suspicions and

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*domestic debates in Victorian literature.* Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1990, 110.)

aversions produced by xenophobia and ethnocentrism, racial attitudes became more rigid and emotive in character, and a new inflexibility and contempt characterized English attitudes to the Negro. (60)

This Victorian change of attitudes redefined the idea of the gentleman and from this moment on “a white skin became one essential mark of a gentleman, and blacks of all ranks and degrees were firmly placed in the lowest orders of nature and society” (68). The subsequent decades of the nineteenth century saw a growing emphasis on the racial aspect of the gentleman as the fundamental stereotype of the English upper classes, very much indebted both to popular culture and to the ideological work of “scientists” engaged in the definition of “Human Races.”<sup>164</sup> By the end of the century, the virulence of imperialism and racial discourse responds to the crisis of Empire, a profound sense of decline, summed up by Brantlinger: “The vanishing of frontiers, the industrialization of travel and warfare, the diminishing chances for heroism, the disillusionment with civilization and the civilizing mission—these late Victorian and early modern themes point insistently toward another: the decline of Britain’s position in the world as an industrial, military, and imperial power” (44). In the last decades of the century many more aggressive literary responses would either try to subvert or debate this English crisis of confidence.<sup>165</sup> As Brantlinger puts it:

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<sup>164</sup> See Lorimer’s chapters “4. Mid-Victorian Philanthropy and the Popular Stereotype of the Negro” and “7. Scientific Racism and Mid-Victorian Racial Attitudes” to understand some of the multiple cultural influences that shaped racial stereotypes of the so-called “races of men.” On the pseudo-scientific arguments that constructed “race” and which lead to the racialisation of Victorian society see Christine Bolt’s *Victorian Attitudes to Race*; and Nancy Stepan, *The idea of race in science: Great Britain, 1800-1960*. Hamden: Archon Books, 1982.

<sup>165</sup> It is important to reiterate here that some authors, especially Raymond Williams and Patrick Brantlinger have insisted on the fact that the crisis is not just external and imperial but that this was another aspect of a more general crisis that begins at home, in Great Britain. In this regard, it is very instructive to consult Daniel Bivona’s *Desire and contradiction* in his comparison of Haggard, Conrad, and Hardy. In this chapter he argues the following idea: “three writers (Haggard, Conrad, and Hardy) are central to the discussion here because in their work they go well beyond a simple-minded recapitulation of the Victorian cultural hierarchy of the civilized over the primitive. All three self-consciously draw on evolutionary ideas to define the ‘civilized’ as existing in a multifarious dependency relationship with the ‘primitive,’ a relationship which they could explore not only because evolutionary doctrines had brought these two realms together, but because political imperialism was making ‘available’ to Europeans the lives and customs of existent ‘primitives’ and, in Hardy’s case, suggesting analogies between ‘primitive’ aliens and England’s homegrown

Imperialism grew particularly racist and aggressive from the 1870's on, partly because the social class domination of both the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy was perceived to be eroding. Inscribed in the adventure narratives of many late Victorian and Edwardian writers is the desire to revitalize not only heroism but aristocracy. . . . The nineteenth century experienced an 'eclipse' and numerous attempts at resurrection of the hero, attempts that became increasingly militant in the era of the New Imperialism. An eclipse of the hero characterizes one sort of Victorian fiction—Thackeray's 'novel without a hero,' for example, or the impossibility of leading 'epic lives' expressed in *Middlemarch*. But there was a resurgence of heroes and hero-worship in another sort—in, for example, Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* (1853) and the burgeoning new industry of boys' adventure tales, started by Captain Marryat. Through the history of the imperializing West, domesticity seeks and finds its antithesis in adventure, in charismatic quests and voyages that disrupt and rejuvenate. (35-6)

Whereas heroic fiction for both adults and youngsters is one of the principal means of the popular dissemination of the imperialist discourse, which is deeply permeated by the racist one, Brantlinger points out another literature that questions the epic hero and that is going to find representatives in Stevenson's later works and in the works of Joseph Conrad. Though the most important contemporary literature supported the imperial discourse, contributing to its fulfillment, the doubts that were beginning to surface in society are also frequently exposed:

Imperialist discourse is inseparable from racism. Both express economic, political, and cultural domination (or at least wishes for domination), and both grew more virulent and dogmatic as those forms of domination, threatened by rivals for empire and by nascent independence movements (the Indian National Congress, for example), began gradually to crumble in the waning decades of the century. Not only do stereotypes of natives and savages degenerate toward the ignoble and the bestial in late Victorian thinking, however; so do the seemingly contrasting images of European explorers, traders, and colonizers. . . . late Victorian literature is filled with backsliders like Conrad's Kurtz who themselves become white savages. (Brantlinger 39)

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'primitives.' Empire, in short, seemed like a relatively convenient laboratory for the study of the childhood of the world" (78).

Brantlinger argues that by the end of the century, novels such as Stevenson's *The Beach of Falesá* and *The Ebb Tide* along with other works of the period can be compared to those of Conrad in the sense that "although they sometimes criticize the violence, exploitation, and racism of imperialism, Conrad's stories more consistently express the diminution of chances for heroism in the modern world, the decline of the adventure" (42).<sup>166</sup> The hero is the upper-class man *par excellence*, so the decline of the hero is the decline of the gentleman. In tracing the cultural function of the gentleman—read in terms of "caste" rather than in historical terms as Lorimer does—in the development of the adventure novel from Defoe to Conrad, Martin Green concludes that "[t]he modern novel has been largely about the conflict between castes and caste values, but in a covert and obscured way. The caste dialectic was muffled and disguised everywhere in the modern system by the dominant work ethic, which stripped the aristocrat of his vocational dignity. And in England the situation was especially confused by the greater power of its merchant caste, so anxious to dub itself gentlemanly—that is, aristocratic but not military. The English novel of adventure reflected that confusion, and imposed class terms upon it."<sup>167</sup>

*Lord Jim's* questioning of the gentleman, therefore, contrary to what has too often been suggested, ought not to be necessarily thought of as an anti-imperialist message.<sup>168</sup> The debate of the times focused on the nature of the colonizer, about his duties and responsibilities, a discussion emanating from the scandals and particularly intensive exploitation of many territories of the Empire such as the King Leopold's Congo, as well as the Boer Wars. Indeed, as Boo Eung Koh notes, "[i]n *Lord Jim*, Conrad advocates a 'new' conception of

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<sup>166</sup> See an overview of Conrad's questioning of his heroes in Marialusia Bignami, "Joseph Conrad, the Malay Archipelago, and the Decadent Hero." *The Review of English Studies* New Series 38.150 (May 1987): 199-210.

<sup>167</sup> Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1979, 20.

<sup>168</sup> To my understanding, John A. McClure's opinion that "of Conrad's fundamental opposition to imperialism there can be no doubt" (94) is overly unequivocal, which is clear from his failure to render Marlow's indecision about Jim. Actually, however, the author's comparison in his introductory chapter between Kipling and Conrad allows us to behold the complexity of stances towards imperialism and the dangerous tendency toward their simplification. (*Kipling and Conrad: The Colonial Fiction*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981). On the critique of the Empire see Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical attitudes to colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914*. London and New York: MacMillan and St. Martin's Press, 1968.

imperialism which became necessary when the hitherto dominant imperialist system faced its crisis” since, as her own example shows, “the overlapping of the writing of *Lord Jim* with the prosecution of the 1899 Boer War suggests that Conrad’s projection of an ideal imperialism in the novel is for a justification of the superiority of the British cause.”<sup>169</sup> Therefore, as the contemporary writings of J. A. Hobson demonstrate, this is a discussion about Empire from within, concerned with identifying the most adequate way forward and the manner of exercising dominion.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Boo Eung Koh, “Contradictions in Colonial History in *Lord Jim*.” *Conradiana* 28.3 (1996): 164 and 166.

<sup>170</sup> J. A. Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study*, first published in 1902, is considered to be the first clearly anti-imperialist study. In the same direct accusatory tone used throughout book, he concludes with a final condemnation of imperialism: “Imperialism is a depraved choice of national life, imposed by self-seeking interests which appeal to the lusts of quantitative acquisitiveness and of forceful domination surviving in a nation from early centuries of animal struggle for existence. Its adoption as a policy implies a deliberate renunciation of that cultivation of the higher inner qualities which for a nation as for an individual constitutes the ascendancy of reason over brute impulse. It is the besetting sin of all successful States, and its penalty is unalterable in the order of nature.” (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1965, 368). Hobson’s forceful critique, however, naturally incorporates some contemporary cultural assumptions such as the unquestioned racial hierarchy and the idea of the need for progress and the bringing of “civilization.” Thus, even his clear accusation displays the complexities of what we tend to label simply an “anti-imperialist” stand. Hobson cares to place expressions that come from the imperial discourse in quotation marks, yet it is clear that he assumes most of them, though he does so skeptically. His central concern is, indeed, as I have argued, the motives and strategies of Western countries in the territories of Empire. His purposes are both moral and political, and he addresses some of the problems by providing solutions to the proper management and the exercise of influence or dominion abroad. In his own words: “This claim to justify aggression, annexation, and forcible government by talk of duty, trust, or mission can only be made good by proving that the claimant is accredited by a body genuinely representative of civilization, to which it acknowledges a real responsibility, and that it is in fact capable of executing such a trust” (239). Further on he points the way to achieving real progress: “So far as Imperialism seeks to justify itself by sane civilization of lower races, it will endeavour to raise their industrial and moral status on their own lands, preserving as far as possible the continuity of the old tribal life and institutions, protecting them against the force and deceit of prospectors, labour touts, and other persons who seek to take their land and entice away their labour. If under the gradual teaching of industrial arts and the general educational influences of a white protectorate many of the old political, social, and religious institutions decay, that decay will be a natural wholesome process, and will be attended by the growth of new forms and conforming to laws of natural grow in order to adapt native life to a changed environment.

Contrary to first impressions, the questioning of the ideal colonizer, whose paradigm is the English gentleman, does not imply a balanced counterpoint in relation to its original counterpart stereotype of the colonized Other. Surprisingly, the inquiry into the notion of an ideal Englishman has the effect of ensuring that the stereotypes of the other “races” degenerate even further and appear even more aggressive. If this is again the case in *Heart of Darkness*, the African setting of which is far more extreme than the Malay, the fact that in *Lord Jim* only the gentleman stereotype is subject to revision, and not the other racial stereotypes which remain untouched, should at least excite our curiosity.

Some textual evidence suggests that both Marlow and Jim are gentlemen, as when the frame narrator describes Jim as “gentlemanly, steady, tractable” (11), and when Brierly says of Jim “the fellow’s a gentleman” (44) or when Marlow’s friend, to whom the latter sends Jim to work for him, and from whom he needs to flee for some strange and never specified reasons (though homosexuality is strongly suggested), says referring to Jim: “I know a gentleman when I see one, and I know how a gentleman feels” (114).<sup>171</sup> Also, when Marlow and

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But so long as the private, short-sighted business interests of white farmers or white mine-owners are permitted, either by action taken on their own account or through pressure on a colonial or Imperial Government, to invade the lands of ‘lower peoples,’ and transfer to their private profitable purposes the land or labour, the first law of ‘sane’ Imperialism is violated, and the phrases about teaching ‘the dignity of labour’ and raising races of ‘children’ to manhood, whether used by directions of mining companies or by statesmen in the House of the Commons, are little better than wanton exhibitions of hypocrisy. They are based on a falsification of the facts, and a perversion of the motives which actually direct the policy” (289). Conrad shares most of Hobson’s concerns and critiques, and most of them are also to be found in his fiction.

<sup>171</sup> I was astonished to discover an instance of literal intertextuality with Trollope in this sentence of *Lord Jim*, in what seems its original source, which Gilmour uses to synthesize the problematic of the gentleman in the nineteenth century: “Like his own Dr Stanhope in *Barchester Towers*, Trollope was content with the fact that he ‘knew an English gentleman when he saw him’ (ch. 10) Yet, curiously, it is Trollope who comes closest to capturing in a phrase the interdependence of morals and manners, the ethical and the social, in the Victorian concept of the gentleman” (12). In light of Gilmour’s study about the function of the gentleman in the nineteenth century and the heated debate it engendered in English literature, in Thackeray, Dickens and Trollope, I am struck by the lack of critical work on the subject. The influence of Dickens and Trollope on Conrad’s work aligns him to the great English tradition, at least in regards to the central debate over the English gentleman. Conrad discusses the difficulty of defining the gentleman in a very confusing moment where the category of “gentleman” had expanded to accommodate the

Jim converse that night after the Inquiry and Jim says: “Of course I wouldn’t have talked to you about all this if you had not been a gentleman. I ought to have known . . . I am—I am—a gentleman too” (80). In the Author’s note that introduces the volume of *Youth and two other stories*, Conrad cheerfully warns his readers not to speculate about Marlow, yet he refers to “the origins of that gentleman (nobody as far as I know has ever hinted that he was anything but that).”<sup>172</sup> To Jacques Darras, “the flippant remark of Conrad . . . raises by the very incongruity of its nature, certain doubts. His expression of satisfaction and surprise that no exegete had ever formulated the discourteous hypothesis of ‘fraudulent’ intentions of ‘charlatanism’ concerning Marlow makes one immediately suspicious and brings to the forefront of the mind a certain mistrust which, until that moment, had been dormant.”<sup>173</sup> Thus, in his ambivalent, ironic tone, Conrad acknowledges his activating of the stereotype of the gentleman in the figure of his most developed narrator.<sup>174</sup>

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transition to the new industrial and imperial Great Britain. Nostalgia, debates about birth, manners, education, morality, are intensely discussed in Thackeray, Dickens and Trollope in much the same way as they are confronted by Conrad. So the idea of the gentleman should be considered both in relation to the imperial hero and in relation to the domestic figure treated by the authors mentioned. In fact, the gentleman simultaneously performs both internal English and external roles. It is intriguing that, in general, both faces of the gentleman have been studied separately (except in Lorimer and Brantlinger’s books). A wider comprehension of Conrad’s place in the history and evolution of English literature should consider the idea of the gentleman as a hinge between imperial literature and the great domestic literature of the time, instead of separating them.

<sup>172</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Youth and two other stories*. New York, Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924, ix.

<sup>173</sup> Jacques Darras, *Joseph Conrad and the West: Signs of Empire*. London: MacMillan Press, 1982, 5.

<sup>174</sup> It is still surprising to me that the subject of the “gentleman” in Conrad’s novels, and more specifically in *Lord Jim*, has not attracted any scholarly attention. Most criticism does not give it much importance, yet gentlemanliness is frequently assumed by many conradians. One of his prominent critics, Norman Sherry, whose book I will refer to afterwards, traced Conrad’s biographical source for Jim mainly in the *Patna* section. This was the first mate of the *Jeddab*, the ship abandoned as it was sinking which inspired the *Patna*, a man called Augustine Podmore Williams. To support his idea that Conrad’s portrait of Jim is based on Williams, Sherry points to their common gentlemanliness: “Linked with the attitude of not shirking and of ‘fighting this thing down’, is the ideal of the English gentleman. References to Jim’s gentlemanliness are made constantly in the novel, and in this sense also he is distinguished from the rest of the deserters. It implies a special mode of speech and behaviour on Jim’s part, and his action and his situation in the Inquiry become much worse because of his transgression of the gentleman’s code” (*Conrad’s Eastern World*.

The stereotype of the English gentleman as the prototype of the “Anglo-Saxon race” owes most of its codification to the public schools, and its mid to late-Victorian definition significantly suits Jim’s appearance, character and attitudes. Marlow is heard more than he is seen, though his telling of Jim informs us much about himself too. However much we can infer about his gentility, it is evident that Jim bears the brunt of this racial stereotype in the novel. Lorimer clarifies why our understanding of the gentleman assumes an essentially racist basis from the 1860s until the end of the century:

As wealthy, respectable mid-Victorians became more competitive in the search for gentle positions in a new urban aristocracy, they also became more exclusive in their attitudes. Physical features identified even the most refined of black gentlemen with a savage heritage and a slave past. At the same time, the urban gentry found a convenient substitute for the family or blood relationship of the traditional aristocracy in a common identity as members of the Anglo-Saxon race. A white skin became one essential quality of a gentleman. (113)<sup>175</sup>

This Anglo-Saxon racial stereotype was thought particularly fit to lead the Imperial enterprise and to incarnate the ideals that schoolboys should strive for:

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Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966, 75). Like Darras, Sherry points out Conrad’s distance from Jim’s gentlemanliness: “Certainly Jim is given preparatory school language and enthusiasms which do not suit the man we have met earlier narrating the story of his disaster to Captain Marlow. No doubt Conrad was trying to reproduce the language of a young gentleman and we must take into account that preparatory school slang may have sounded less absurd then than it does now. But it may be Conrad’s intention to offer in this way a submerged criticism of Lord Jim, indicating his fundamental immaturity. The inadequacy of Jim’s response in terms of language at certain crucial moments suggests an ironic attitude to his hero on Conrad’s part” (77).

<sup>175</sup> C. C. Eldridge points out how social evolution developed from Darwin’s evolutionist theories parallels racial hierarchy: “Since social evolution and racial hierarchy were assumed to go hand in hand, the Anglo-Saxon gentleman with his white skin and inborn qualities which enabled him to rule the world was naturally placed at the top of the ladder. Other races were ranked according to how they measured up to this ideal. Thus social Darwinism injected a scientific and sociological content into mid-Victorian race-thinking, supporting and reinforcing the changes already underway in racial and class attitudes.” (*The Imperial Experience: From Carlyle to Forster*. London, MacMillan Press, 1996, 160). See also his earlier *Victorian Imperialism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1978) for an overview of the nineteenth century British Empire.

At the expanding public schools, the sons of the country gentlemen and of wealthy urban businessmen learned, often at the expense of sentiment and intellectual achievement, the virtues of manliness and athleticism. They also learned how English gentlemen ruled an Empire, and they came to have pride in, and some actually to emulate, the achievements of these schoolboy heroes. The public schools disseminated both the creed of the gentlemen and the ideals of Empire. (113)

As a result of this process of forging the mid and late Victorian heroes, “by the 1860s, the public schools had begun to create a new breed of taciturn, manly, tough-minded, stiff-upper-lipped, young gentlemen who could no longer tolerate the emotional appeals which had moved an earlier generation” (Lorimer 113). Manliness, athleticism and heroism will combine with the aforementioned qualities to constitute the ideal of the gentleman, as well as Christianity.<sup>176</sup> Of course, this ideal is popularized in the adventure novel which had begun to emerge with force by the 1840s. Though I will refer to Conrad and Marlow’s use of the genre afterwards, it is worth noting here that the stereotype of the gentleman is supposed to comprise the features transmitted through education and confidently assumed by the imperial romance. What is remarkable here is that the difference between most of the novels in this tradition and Conrad’s *Lord Jim* is that this stereotype is questioned in the latter, as it is in other texts, in stark contrast to the public schools’ doctrine and most of the imperial literature at the end of the century.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Eldridge notes the crucial role of public schools in character building: “The public schools were the nursery of empire. From the 1850s, their whole ethos—fagging, the perfect system, the cult of athleticism, the house, spartan living conditions—was geared to instilling group and institutional loyalty, obedience, ‘manliness’, self-control, resourcefulness, the ability to command, all the qualities essential to a ruling race capable of surviving in imperial climes. In short, the training of ‘character’ took precedence over intellectual studies.” (*The Imperial Experience* 90) See also Beth Sharon Ash’s description of the training in manliness in *Writing in Between: Modernity and Psychosocial Dilemma in the Novels of Joseph Conrad*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999, 93-5.

<sup>177</sup> V. S. Naipaul feels that more than a story about honor, *Lord Jim* “is about the theme—much more delicate in 1900 than today—of the racial straggler.” His reflections about Conrad’s work are very interesting from the point of view of how Conrad has historically been understood and of why some readers have problems in evaluating his work. (“Conrad’s Darkness,” *Joseph Conrad: Third World Perspectives*. Comp. and ed. Robert D. Hamner. Washington: Three Continents Press, 1990, 192)

The stereotype of the gentleman works as a cultural assumption in *Lord Jim*.<sup>178</sup> This has not been sufficiently underscored by Conrad's critics. Jim's gentility is suggested by his personal and physical traits, which are at once endorsed and interrogated. It remains, for the reader even more than for Marlow, at the heart of the narrative enigma. In the following pages I will attempt to demonstrate how Conrad and Marlow activate the stereotype of the gentleman in the reader's mind.

The previously cited remarks about Jim's status as a gentleman are few and far between in such a long narrative. However, the readers' participation is demanded to complete those fragmentary references to Jim's character and appearance that fit the stereotype of gentility, and that are confirmed by explicit though infrequent designations of him as a gentleman. But Jim's relation to the qualities of a gentleman do not always meet the expectations of the reader, particularly in the first four chapters of the novel, told by the frame narrator. Neither do these traits conform with Jim's actions in the so called "first part" of *Lord Jim* seen from Marlow's perspective. In fact, the act of jumping from the *Patna* is fundamentally at odds with an imperial gentleman's behavior. That is indeed the heart of the matter. And we can see how meaningful this jump is throughout an ironic anecdote of a similar yet historical catastrophe: in her insightful study of the English gentleman, Christine Berberich acknowledges the complexity of the definition of the "gentleman," which leads her to conclude that "where words seem inadequate, deeds can speak more clearly. When, on 15 April 1912, the Titanic sank, many of her male passengers acted out what it meant for them to be gentlemen, by refusing seats in the few lifeboats" (3). The sinking of the Titanic occurred after the publication of *Lord Jim*, at a time when, as Berberich suggests, the idea of the gentleman was already in decline. Yet here I want to draw attention to how the gentlemen's way of proving themselves as such so transparently determines the way Jim's jump was read in contemporary society. In this section, I will try to pursue the development of the stereotype of the gentleman as it is alternately upheld and rendered unfit following the navigational chart between confirmation and disapproval drawn by Marlow's telling.

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<sup>178</sup> To understand the extended, albeit at some points undefined, codification of the stereotype, see David Castronovo's *The English Gentleman: Images and Ideals in Literature and Society* (New York: Ungar, 1987) and Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982).

Marlow's constant indirect references to his gentility as the expected behavioral norm are found throughout the novel. It is impossible to render all the pertinent textual evidence, so I will limit myself to the clearest examples in support of my argument. We find descriptions of Jim's physical features, his character and attitudes scattered across the narrative, uttered by different narrative voices. In the first four chapters, whiteness is emphasized in contrast to the other inhabitants of the colonial space, which sets the stage for the colorful central dichotomy between the civilized and the non-civilized world, suggesting a world of whiteness and a world of darkness. This contrast, which is intensified in the second section of the novel, is proposed at the very beginning and appears bestrewn throughout the first half, above all in the opening chapters.<sup>179</sup>

"He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built" and "he was spotlessly neat, appareled in immaculate white from shoes to hat" (7), reads the opening paragraph of *Lord Jim*, singling out as the most notable features his height (though it seems that he falls of the ideal by an inch) and his powerful body complexion. His attire will provide repeated reminders of the whiteness of his skin.<sup>180</sup> Both physical traits and the neatness of appearance are insisted upon in the novel, strikingly so when Marlow describes waving good-bye to Jim of the last time he sees him in Patusan: "he was white from head to foot, and remained persistently visible with the stronghold of the night at his back" (199). "Having a steady head with an excellent physique, he was very smart aloft" (9), says the frame narrator. His athleticism is remarked upon at the end of the novel when we are told that in Patusan there is a legend (which is ironic, because it is a myth, at the same time that it recalls his previously described body complexion) that Jim "had carried the guns up to the hill on his back—two at a

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<sup>179</sup> We find references to whiteness and blackness apart from those already mentioned: "black ingratitude" (8), "to the white men in the waterside business" (8), "drove him away for good from seaports and white men" (8), "shades in the danger of adventures" (11), "in the white men's ward" (12), "the distinction of being white" (13), "The five whites on board" (15), "the wisdom of white men" (15), "rested upon a white man [Marlow]" (24), "He met the eyes of the white man" (24).

<sup>180</sup> Robert F. Lee reminds us of the great importance of attire in the British Empire in *Conrad's colonialism*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1969, 66-72. In the course of his rich description, he concludes that "the matter of dress in Conrad is one indication of a civilized, 'humanizing' ceremoniousness and an intrinsic discipline quite rightly expected of any group which assumes the responsibility of correctly administering others. It is indicative of a discipline of identity" (72).

time” (159), as well as when Marlow feels Jim could have beaten him.<sup>181</sup> His fitness is reinforced and at the same time overused, as the submerged signals of Jim’s aggressiveness pointed out further below indicate.

If manliness can be related to physical force, it is also linked to courage, which becomes the main quality compromised by Jim’s jump from the *Patna*. The frame narrator’s telling of the episode of the cutter ironically observes that, after failing or refusing to help in the collision, Jim “exulted with fresh certitude in his avidity for adventure, and in a sense of many-sided courage”(11). Jim’s moral courage is questioned every time he abruptly abandons his most recent job under Marlow’s distressed gaze, in an aim to escape his own guilt. Marlow insists on Jim’s courage and judges it to be one of the main qualities of those of “our kind.” He mentions it when he describes the first time he saw Jim, in a very significant passage:

I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance; he came from the right place; he was one of us. He stood there for all the parentage of his kind, for men and women by no means clever or amusing, but whose very existence is based upon honest faith, and upon the instinct of courage. I don’t mean military courage, or civil courage, or any special kind of courage. I mean just that inborn ability to look temptations straight in the face, —a readiness unintellectual enough, goodness knows, but without a pose, —a power of resistance, don’t you see, ungracious if you like, but priceless—an unthinking and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature and the seductive corruption of men—backed by a faith

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<sup>181</sup> Marlow describes the moment of the yellow cur incident: “It strikes me now I have never in my life been so near a beating—I mean it literally; a beating with fists. . . though not exceptionally big, he looked generally fit to demolish a wall” (46). For the importance of masculinity in Conrad in relation to race, but also in the development of the relationships among men in the Empire, see Andrew Michael Roberts, *Conrad and Masculinity*. London and New York: MacMillan Press LTD and St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 2000; with regards to Masculinity in the Victorian age, including a chapter on the gentleman and one on the new imperialism, see John Tosh’s *Manliness and masculinities in nineteenth-century Britain: essays on gender, family, and empire*. Harlow and New York: Pearson Longman, 2005. Of real interest for its comparison between England and the United States is *Manliness and morality: Middle-class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*. Ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987. For the role that “masculinity” plays in the idea of the gentleman, see Karen Volland Waters, *The Perfect Gentleman: Masculine Control in Victorian Men’s Fiction, 1870-1901*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997.

invulnerable to the strength of facts, to the contagion of example, to the solicitation of ideas. (30)

Courage is this detached, indifferent, and passionless attitude towards life that resists anything, which Marlow chooses as the main feature in his description of the right people, of “us” whose “right kind of looks” he boasts to recognize at first sight. Most of Marlow’s unsatisfied judgments of Jim’s personality are related to this highly abstract notion of “one of us,” which becomes the *leitmotif* of the novel. This aspect of *Lord Jim* has garnered much critical attention.

It seems evident that it does not suggest a single community but many, which as concentric ripples in the water have Marlow as their epicenter, signaled by the use of the inclusive plural personal pronoun “us.” From my point of view, this expression needs to be linked to orality and its function in the novel. Though I will argue this extensively, at this point I want to advance the idea that orality seems to conform to a structure of the telling that functions as concentric ripples do, extending the area of inclusion, while at the same time gradually losing their original strength. In other words, Marlow seems to refer to multiple communities that can think of themselves as “us” in a gradation of audiences. Those closer to Marlow in every sense share most of the signs of identity that define that community, while the last to be reached by his appeal have the smallest share of the latter. In this sense, those who are closest to Marlow are his listeners that night, who work in the British merchant marine and constitute a community of craft. More specifically, this first circle seems to include only white gentleman working in the British merchant marine. Moving on from there on we could think of other communities such as the craft itself, the English people, the Western people and whites in general.<sup>182</sup> In this sense, “one of us” appeals not only to the craft—even though many of Marlow’s interventions are addressed to

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<sup>182</sup> Ian Watt affirms that “in the ten or so places where the term ‘one of us’ occurs in *Lord Jim*, its usage is roughly consistent. It denotes a member of the social, vocational, and, in some unexamined sense, moral, elite; to belong it is necessary to be a gentleman—both Brierly and the second engineer agree that Jim is that (67,190); and it is also necessary to work, but in a managerial capacity, or, to put it somewhat more concretely, to be a member in good standing of the group which comprises the members of the professions, such as Marlow, and the colonial planters and business men who are his auditors.” (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1979, 312.)

seamen—but to a broader community distinguished by gentility and whiteness as its chief elements. As Francis Mulhern puts it:

Brierly's particular fear of scandal, and the terms in which he evokes the Inquiry, suggest that 'we' are not, or not finally, the community of 'the craft'—which also includes some of those with whom he disgustedly refuses affinity. 'We,' as a later, contrastive reference to 'one of us' reveals, are the category of 'white men.' But only a category, not a community, for which far more intimate conditions of affiliation must be satisfied. Marlow is unfailingly sensitive to national and racial difference. Much of the time, this is the dominant in his characterology, a sufficient sign of personality and a leading clue to conduct.<sup>183</sup>

The witty distinction between 'category' and 'community' is a clue to how the doubt over a fixed standard of conduct emerges. Jim's behavior fails when measured against the fixity of the stereotype of the English gentleman, unveiling the ambivalent working structure of the stereotype as a form that in its fixity refrains the circularity of the plural experience.

Mulhern's interpretation of the expression "one of us" as standing for white people is reinforced when "us" is opposed to "them," for example in Marlow's refusal to admit the Malay Dain Warris as one more of "our kind": "He had not Jim's racial prestige and the reputation of invincible, supernatural power. . . . Beloved, trusted, and admired as he was, he was still one of *them*, while Jim was one of *us*. Moreover, the white man, a tower of strength in himself, was invulnerable, while Dain Warris could be killed" (214). The link between whiteness and the notions of "one of us" —or "we," as it often appears—is self-evident here. Even though the "one of us" has many functions in the novel, it works efficiently to activate racial issues, for it involves statements that approve of or inquire into the ideal characterization of the stereotype of the English gentleman, as in the passage cited above.

Returning to the distinguishing qualities of the gentleman, Jim's detached attitude and apparent indifference in the course of their relationship might fit Marlow's description of the courage that "our" kind is endowed with. Jim's taciturnity and obstinate mind result in

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<sup>183</sup> Francis Mulhern, "Conrad's Inconceivable History," *New Left Review* 38 (March-April 2006): 70.

Marlow's discomfort and disorientation: his main problem is that he cannot decide what Jim really thinks or feels, unable to avoid the feeling that Jim's appearance is misleading and his telling of past deceptive, as the analysis of both narrative voices has illustrated. Jim's aloof attitude suggests his duplicity. He appears to confront and courageously resist the criticism of his deed, but at the same time Marlow is not sure whether he really feels guilty. It is this detached attitude that allows Jim to impede the intrusion of other people into his inner self. So this quality of courage and the enduring indifference which Marlow identifies as proper to "us" turns out to be the obstacle at the root of the enigma troubling Marlow, concerning the relationship between Jim's appearances and reality.

The fundamental question is whether Jim is a real gentleman—apart from his other questioned identities, individual or collective, such as that of a sailor in the British Merchant Marine, for "[h]e looked as genuine as a new sovereign, but there was some infernal alloy in his metal. How much? The least thing—the least drop of something rare and accursed; the least drop!—but he made you—standing there with his don't-care-hang air—he made you wonder whether perchance he were nothing more rare than brass" (32). For Parry, "what Marlow is concerned to prove is how Jim's fidelity to imperialism's saving ideals establishes him, despite his defection, as 'one of us'" (89). Parry points out that "[i]t is loyalty to such an unwritten, uncodified and ahistorical ethos that the action that the fiction proffers as the valid basis of solidarity, and since Jim never ceases to pay homage to the precepts of this commonwealth . . . he remains by that definition and by Marlow's valuation, 'one of us'" (88).

Marlow's deep nostalgia for his youth is projected onto Jim, not only in his paternal instinct toward guidance, responsibility and melancholy, but also as an egoistical concern. He mentions his youth along with his distanced looks when he first sees him, "an upstanding, broad-shouldered youth, with his hands in his pockets, turning his back on the other two . . . The young chap, making no movement, not even stirring his head, just stared into the sunshine. This was my first view of Jim. He looked as unconcerned and unapproachable as only the young can look. There he stood, clean-limbed, clean-faced, firm on his feet, as promising a boy as the sun ever shone on" (28).

His looks, however, are usually accompanied by the shadows of his enigmatic self, as perceived by the experienced Marlow: “looking at him, knowing all he knew and a little more too, I was as angry as though I had detected him trying to get something out of me by false pretences. He had no business to look so sound. I thought to myself—well, if this sort can go wrong like that . . .” (29). Youth as the symbol of the hopes for a brilliant future, for the ambition and energy required to succeed is obscured by the mysterious weakness of the subject Marlow investigates: “Was it for my own sake that I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow whom I had never seen before, but whose appearance alone added a touch of personal concern to the thoughts suggested by the knowledge of his weakness—made it a thing of mystery and terror—like a hint of a destructive fate ready for us all whose youth—in its day—had resembled his youth?” (35).

Jim’s youth and attractive looks which identify “us” reinforce the link between the community Marlow is referring to and the stereotype of the gentleman: “And all the time I had before me these blue boyish eyes looking straight into mine, this young face, these capable shoulders, the open bronzed forehead with a white line under the roots of clustering fair hair, this appearance appealing at sight to all my sympathies: this frank aspect, the artless smile, the youthful seriousness. He was of the right sort; he was one of us” (50).<sup>184</sup> Yet Marlow judges the consequences of an irresponsible youth when he observes that “[h]e was voluble like a youngster on the eve of a long holiday with a prospect of delightful scrapes, and such an attitude of mind in a grown man and in this connection had in it something phenomenal, a little mad, dangerous, unsafe” (141).

In drawing our attention to the gentleman’s codified stiff upper-lip, Watt believes that

throughout his public ordeal, and even with Marlow, Jim feels he must maintain that stiff upper-lip for which the Victorian gentleman was celebrated. Given Jim’s actual circumstances, it is strenuous and unnatural psychological posture; and so when he is challenged, his

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<sup>184</sup> There are many other observations and reflections about youth, some of them linked as well to Marlow’s *leitmotif* “one of us”: “the occasion was obscure, insignificant—what you will: a lost youngster, one in a million—but then he was one of us” (59)

precarious surface calm turns rapidly into the suspicious and taciturn belligerence which so disconcerts Marlow at their first meeting. (317)

The stiff upper-lip is also mentioned by Brierly in a passage Mulhern refers to in order to argue that “one of us” is ultimately tied to whiteness, and, I will add, to gentility more specifically:

The worst of it, ‘he said, ‘is that all you fellows have no sense of dignity; you don’t think enough of what you are supposed to be.’ . . . ‘This is a disgrace. We’ve got all kinds amongst us—some anointed scoundrels in the lot; but, hang it, we must preserve professional decency or we become no better than so many tinkers going about loose. We are trusted. Do you understand? —trusted! Frankly, I don’t care a snap for all the pilgrims that ever came out of Asia, but a decent man would not have behaved like this to a full cargo of old rags in bales. We aren’t an organised body of men, and the only thing that holds us together is just the name of that kind of decency. Such an affair destroys one’s confidence. A man may go pretty near through his whole sea-life without any call to show a stiff upper lip. But when the call comes . . . Aha! . . . If I . . .’ (44)

Brierly’s awareness of the need for holding onto a fixed standard of conduct that would retain its coherence, especially before the eyes of the outside world, defines the category of whiteness mentioned by Mulhern.<sup>185</sup> It is the presence of other communities we differentiate through stereotypes that make our stereotype work. The interplay of presence/absence is a working narrative strategy in the novel that we are going to analyze further along. We find a clear example of it here. Brierly’s perception of the erosion of an imagined community of whiteness by a deed like Jim’s jump is reflected in his feeling that “[t]his infernal publicity is too shocking: there he sits while all these

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<sup>185</sup> Of course, Brierly’s comment implies numerous other perspectives, apart from the call of whiteness. In fact, it involves the debate over agency and instrumentality discussed by Daniel Bivona in his *British Imperial Literature, 1870-1940: Writing and the administration of empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). Referring to Conrad the critic notes that “[t]hroughout the fictional creation of a series of memorably ‘unsteady’ characters in positions of leadership including Kurtz, Lord Jim, and Nostromo, Conrad examines the way in which the kind of agency on which Weber bestowed the name ‘charisma’ comes to be exercised in the imperial field. Moreover, Conrad is preoccupied with the dangers that the autonomy of the charismatic figure poses for bureaucratic objectives, and thus, his novels train their focus ultimately on a disciplinary project, on the way in which such autonomy is curbed and finally channeled into the service of bureaucratic ends.” (104)

confounded natives, serangs, lascars, quartermasters, are giving evidence that's enough to burn a man to ashes with shame" (44).

Marlow's fascination with Jim, his prying into "the mystery of his attitude" that has a hold on him "as though he [Jim] had been an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect the mankind's conception of itself" testifies to the narrator's perception of Jim as someone very much in the mould of those gentlemen leaders of the Imperial enterprise (59).

As for Jim's familiar past, we know that "originally he came from a parsonage. Many commanders of fine merchant-ships come from these abodes of piety and peace" (8). This social origin confirms that he is a gentleman (Gilmour 3). His Christianity, even though it does not intervene in Marlow's telling of his story, stands out for its contrast to the pilgrims' and the inhabitants of Patusan's—whether Malay, Bugis, or Sherif Ali's subordinates—Islamism, three communities clearly portrayed as inferior. However, the frame narrator continues his description of Jim's father thus: "Jim's father possessed such certain knowledge of the unknowable as made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions." Terry Collits recalls Conrad's ambivalent narrative voices here too since "Jim's family home is described briefly but critically. It is located in a world which has its own 'certain' and hypocritical moral codes, designed to accommodate the class-divided community in which his father is a representative moral arbiter."<sup>186</sup>

In *Lord Jim* all of the fixed ideal features of the Imperial English gentleman develop negative consequences due to their excessive presence: an excess of manliness and fitness results in impulsive violence and aggressiveness; extreme youth explains Jim's childish, idealist illusion of becoming a hero like those of the adventure novels as well as the impulsive reaction in the jump; a too unflinching disposition to resist and protect himself against his guilt reached inconceivable proportions and left him completely isolated from the human world, even from his love interest, Jewel. Finally, his Christianity is questioned as he is unable to clear his conscience of the offending act, as a result of which Jim is not allowed to go back home.

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<sup>186</sup> Terry Collits, *Postcolonial Conrad: Paradoxes of Empire*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, 131.

Nonetheless, Jim's uncertain gentlemanliness is confronted by the end of the novel by another "gentleman" whose fake name enriches the discussion about the plausibility of the "gentleman" as a consistent category. Captain Brown, who says that "my name is not Brown . . ." He grinned horribly. . . . "Gentleman Brown" (204), works as a parody of the gentleman, for his repulsive description is cut out from that of the well-known pirates of the area, as J. H. Stape has demonstrated in tracing his portrait to Conrad's literary sources.<sup>187</sup> Brown's opposition to Jim, both physical and moral by the end of the story, just as Jim's life is approaching its zenith, has the primary function of making the latter shine as one apparently in possession of the coded features of the gentleman. Brown intends for their confrontation to result in a treacherous alliance grounded in their common whiteness. As this alliance constitutes an act of betrayal, whiteness as a guarantee of certain values is brought into question. Outcasts are not a new topic of discussion for Conrad.<sup>188</sup> *Lord Jim* has in Kassim a Malay who "was perfectly able to perceive the difference of character, and had seen enough of white men to know that these new-comers were outcasts, men without country." His acknowledgement that Jim's was "the reign of the white man who protected the poor" (217) intensifies the opposition between Gentleman Brown and Jim. Kassim's awareness is narratively relevant because he has—significantly enough—accomplished the pilgrimage to Mecca, and knows about the outside world, rendering his figure a foreshadowing of how the *Patna* abandonment will intercede in Brown and Jim's conversation, at the same time that he underlines the Muslim beliefs of the victims of whiteness in the Malay Archipelago.

The whole episode, and above all Brown and Jim's vibrant conversation, works to both emphasize the racial aspect of the Patusan world, focusing the interests of what Marlow calls "us," and to reaffirm the racial discourse that bound whiteness and the gentleman into a category that should only include those that fit the prescribed standard of conduct. Brown's feeling of antagonism is

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<sup>187</sup> J. H. Stape, "Lous Becke's Gentlemen Pirates and *Lord Jim*." *Lord Jim: Centennial Essays*. Ed. Allan H. Simmons and J. H. Stape. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000. 71-82.

<sup>188</sup> Lloyd Fernando has interestingly argued for a parallel between exiles and outcasts in Conrad's work, seeing them all through the lenses of the expatriated, whose mind is active in the interrogation of the convictions, values and beliefs of an entire civilization. See "Conrad's Eastern Expatriates: A New Version of His Outcasts." *PMLA* 91.1 (January 1976): 78-90.

symptomatic of the working of two clear stereotypes that seem finally, though ironically, to be definitely clear by the end of the novel. As Marlow recalls,

Their antagonism must have been expressed in their glances; I know that Brown hated Jim at first sight. Whatever hopes he might have had vanished at once. This was not the man he had expected to see. He hated him for this—and in a checked flannel shirt with sleeves cut off at the elbows, grey bearded, with a sunken, sun-blackened face—he cursed in his heart the other's youth and assurance, his clear eyes and his untroubled bearing. That fellow had got in a long way before him! He did not look like a man who would be willing to give anything for assistance. He had all the advantages on his side—possession, security, power; he was on the side of an overwhelming force! He was not hungry and desperate, and he did not seem in the least afraid. And there was something in the very neatness of Jim's clothes, from the white helmet to the canvas leggings and the pipeclayed shoes, which in Brown's somber irritated eyes seemed to belong to things he had in the very shaping of his life contemned and flouted. (225)

With his “mouth full of your responsibility, of innocent lives, of your infernal duty,” Brown condemns Jim for his righteousness in what seems a perfect portrait of the stereotype of the gentleman. Brown's call is the call of the outer world, for “these were the emissaries with whom the world he had renounced was pursuing him in his retreat—white men from ‘out there’ where he did not think himself good enough to live. This was all that came to him—a menace, a shock, a danger to his work” (229). Brown sees this as an opportunity to ask for Jim's sympathy by reminding him that “You have been white once, for all your tall talk of this being of your own people and you being one with them” (226). This racial division of worlds is intensified in their conversation in which “there ran through the rough talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts” (229).

Paradoxically, the “common blood” here does not imply courage, brightness and sunshine, but rather entails fear, guilt, secrecy and darkness. Inherent in this is a perverse call of whiteness that involves betrayal: for Brown whiteness becomes the cultural assumption that will let him induce Jim to decide that “it would be the best to let these

whites and their followers go with their lives. It would be a small gift” (233), even though their mutual understanding in fact reposes in their common betrayal of the right standard of conduct of the white English gentleman. Indeed, it is the fact that Jim sees in Brown a mirror of himself in many aspects, and Brown’s good luck in pointing out the shadows lurking on the other side of whiteness what prompts him to let them go. As Hampson observes, “Brown has the same effect on Jim as Jim has on Brierly: He represents a secret fear and a secret guilt, the self-mistrust that is part of a personality constructed on identification with an altered identity. He speaks to that ‘inseparable partner,’ that repressed aspect of Jim’s self, that Marlow detected earlier” (Hampson, *Joseph Conrad* 126).

Hence, whiteness has a double-edged function in the character of Brown: on the one hand, it is interrogated, through Brown’s personal suffering of the psychological and moral instability of human beings. Besides, his condition as an outcast yet also an individual who shares the physical feature of whiteness but not its moral code of conduct, reveals the vast chasm between the nominal category and real individuals. This questioning of whiteness embodied in the most revolting character of the novel, however, is downplayed by the fact that Brown is described mainly as a traitor, a feature he shares with the traitor Jim of the *Patna* jump. Yet in contrast to Brown, Jim now decides to act according to the right code of conduct that would decree a generous offer of a negotiated, honest end to the conflict. Jim’s adherence to the code, however, has tragic consequences here for it involves another outcast “whom suffering had made blind to right and wrong” (232).

On the other hand, whiteness draws a sharp line of separation between two worlds, and works as a reminder of where Jim belongs. Brown acknowledges in Jim’s whiteness an implied standard of conduct when he affirms that “I would have thought him too white to serve even a rat so [meaning death]” (226). By his rejection of Jim’s neat white wardrobe, Brown seems to renounce whiteness in general, as his name suggests. So whiteness as the convergence of certain values that are coincident with those ascribed to the category of gentlemen is clearly reinforced by the immaculate picture of the confronted characters whose position—“separated only by a muddy bed of a creek, but standing on the opposite poles of that conception of life which include mankind” (226)—reveals their respective places in

Marlow's moral universe. Jim's earlier jump over that creek—his second jump in the novel—finally earns him the sought-after redemption, and clearly distinguishes the outcast Brown from Jim who is now undoubtedly “one of us.”

*Lord Jim* therefore works out the stereotype of the gentleman by way of a complex articulation that at once involves admiration, questioning, and parody embodied in the three characters, Marlow, Jim, and Brown. Marlow remains in the shadows of the story yet his character features appear very much to converge with those of the stereotype of a mature gentleman; Jim inserts doubt in this pattern in the first part of the novel and will be redeemed by his experiences and behavior in Patusan, as well as by contrast to the image of a real outcast, Brown; and the latter works simultaneously to parody the category of the gentleman—yet the parody does not leave any room for confusion—, and to reinforce Jim's whiteness and gentlemanly nature that is finally reconciled with the fixed standard of conduct. Ironically enough, Gentleman Brown ultimately serves to confirm to the reader that the terms under discussion—rarely named in the novel but nevertheless potent activators of culturally ingrained stereotypes—are that of the English gentleman, whose main distinguishing feature by the end of the nineteenth century is, as we have seen, his white skin.

The working of the stereotype of the English gentleman throughout the novel, therefore, takes advantage of the debates of the times and of the highly codified form of the stereotypes, which allows Marlow's audience, as well as the reader, to understand Marlow's dilemma.

### **3. 3. Racial concerns of a community of listeners: orality and racial representation**

The category of the English gentleman as late Victorian society understood it may be the only racial concern of the community of listeners addressed by Marlow. It is circumscribed by the limits that rule traditional storytelling as defined by Walter Benjamin. It is my claim here that orality in *Lord Jim* should be regarded as a narrative strategy that constrains the universality of values imposed by its modern substitute writing form of the novel with its overcoming of

boundaries, which enables the story to reach a tremendous variety of readers.

Indeed, as we are going to analyze, the racial representation of individuals considered to belong to other races retains the characteristics seen by Chinua Achebe in a heatedly debated essay on *Heart of Darkness*, where he pointed to a “dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race” by the intense use of racial stereotypes.<sup>189</sup> More than its criticism about Conrad’s moral standing—which I am convinced is both interesting and helpful to understanding his work and its historical context—it might be more important for the comprehension of *Lord Jim* intended here to discern the constructive function of its loyal adherence to the rigid racial stereotypes that represent the colonial space. Marlow’s inflexible assumption of these stereotypes and the subordination of the racial representation of the Other to a second level of participation in the story might be understood in the context of the debates of the last decades of the nineteenth century, which intensified in the wake of the Governor Eyre Controversy in Jamaica in the 1860s, and were given fresh impetus by the consequences of the scramble for Africa following the Berlin Conference (1885), and the Boer Wars of the 1890s. This debate centered on the ways of conducting the Empire in order to make it more efficient and according to the principles disseminated by an intense propaganda campaign. In this sense, the preoccupation over the morality and efficiency of the colonizers was not concerned with how the colonized populations were treated but rather how the colonizers thought and demonstrated through the propaganda of Empire what the behavior of the public school heroes should be. In this light it is hardly surprising that a writer like Conrad would criticize and question the actions of English colonizers without

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<sup>189</sup> Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa.” 1977. *Joseph Conrad: Third World Perspectives* 125. In my opinion, Achebe’s preoccupation with Conrad’s novella is based on a justified moral stance against racism with an admirable political and social aim. However it runs into some difficulties with the complexity of Conrad’s racial narrative representation. For a discussion of this article, see Todd K. Bender, “The Vocabulary of Race in Conrad.” *Beyond the Roots: The Evolution of Conrad’s Ideology and Art*. Ed. Wieslaw Krajka. Boulder and Lublin: East European Monographs and Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, 2005. 115-128. On Conrad’s view of Africa, see Peter Edgerly Firchow, *Envisioning Africa: Racism and Imperialism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2000. See also a comparison of Conrad’s works with African literature, Byron Caminero-Santangelo, *African Fiction and Joseph Conrad: Reading Postcolonial Intertextuality*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2005.

placing any special emphasis on their colonized counterparts. But, if this contemporary British debate over the Empire explains the marginalization of the Other and its facile depiction based on rigidly codified stereotypes, orality needs to be regarded as the narrative strategy that produces, by its formal discursive characteristics, this historical circumstance.

In his reading of Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller," Muhlemann synthesizes the distinct working of the narratives of storytelling and of the novel, founded on their oral and written nature respectively:

Two general historical conditions detach the novel irrevocably from the world of the tale. The first is institutional, involving a change in the social relations of narration. Storytelling as a form presupposes a basic community of values binding teller and audience: shared intuitions of what is interesting, intelligible, pleasing or repugnant, fitting or not. Indeed, being oral, it depends on the actual co-presence of the two: the moral affinity is confirmed in time and space. Novelistic narrative, in contrast, is mediated as printed text for the market. Both the physical and the cultural supports of the tale fall away. Writing is temporally prior to reading, which, like writing, is now privatized, and practically variable in a way that listening is not. The audience is not only privatized; unknowable to the writer at work, it is also, in principle, unknown in its cultural disposition. Thus, the social relationship that grounds and is fertilized by the tale is cancelled; in a technical term from linguistics, novelistic communication lacks the long-familiar 'phatic' guarantee. (61)

Conrad's modern use of storytelling in the novel, in recollecting his own seafaring experience not only in his construction of the stories and characters but especially in his perpetuation of the craft's tradition of storytelling within the imposed modern form of the novel, condenses the narrative transition towards a modern world that emerges from the ashes of an already smoldering oral tradition. Wieslaw Krajka has argued that "mariners cement and demonstrate their fellowship. *Lord Jim* is the clearest instance of shaping the narration by the conventions of the 'told-tale.' . . . Marlow is turned into a yarner by his repeated tellings of Jim's adventures in the maritime milieu: this makes *Lord Jim* resemble a sea narrative."<sup>190</sup> Indeed, Conrad's work exudes a deep nostalgia for storytelling as a

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<sup>190</sup> Wieslaw Krajka, *Isolation and Ethos: A Study of Joseph Conrad*. Boulder: East European Monographs; New York: Columbia UP, 1992, 154.

more precise form of conveying the abysmal depths of life and holding onto the standard of conduct that Brierly refers to. As Benjamin notes “[a] man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller.”<sup>191</sup> The storyteller comforts the souls of his listeners, as they encounter their own in the storyteller’s experience, and find in his/her wisdom valuable counsel. Conrad’s inescapability from writing as the only remaining way of narrating stories shapes the paradox of orality in the modern novel, the significance of which in Conrad’s work was eloquently stressed by Edward Said:

Conrad’s fate was to write fiction great for its presentation, not only for what it was representing. He was misled by language even as he led language into a dramatization no other author really approached. For what Conrad discovered was that the chasm between words saying and words meaning was widened, not lessened, by a talent for words written. To have chosen to write, then, is to have chosen in a particular way neither to say directly nor to mean exactly in the way he had hoped to say or to mean.<sup>192</sup>

Conrad’s modern narrative use of storytelling achieves to confine the reader to the probably unfamiliar domain of Marlow’s listeners in the sections of the story where Marlow tells it, for “the random, anonymous readers of the novels and shorter fictions are drawn into narratives of a man telling stories, in the controlling perspective of an audience whose objective cultural-institutional coordinates are different from their own. The novel-reading public is refashioned by the thing in its hands as the listening community of the tale” (Mulhern 64). Through this use of storytelling as a modern narrative device Conrad manages—among numerous other rich effects—to reduce the racial discussion to that of the Anglo-Saxon gentleman, in the first place, and to that of whiteness in general by extension. Conrad’s constant reference to “one of us” and his multiple presuppositions as working rhetorical procedures of storytelling force the reader to participate in the reconstruction of Marlow’s implicatures and

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<sup>191</sup> I use the following edition: Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 2007, 100.

<sup>192</sup> Edward W. Said, “Conrad: The Presentation of Narrative.” *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983, 90. Mulhern also points out this paradox which “is that he [Conrad] was profoundly at odds with the conditions of his own writing practice, the novelistic itself. Conrad’s ‘task’, as he struggles ‘to make you see’, is to resolve that paradox—or rather, to manage it, for resolution proper is hardly attainable. The labor of containment is the central process of his writing, the effective substance of his rhetoric” (62).

assumptions. These implicatures and assumptions, so far as they are related to racial issues are nourished by the codified racial discourse of Conrad's contemporaries. Achebe's reading of *Heart of Darkness*, like those of African American readers of Faulkner, does not perceive the references as Marlow's listeners did, nor would a reader unfamiliar with these still deeply ingrained stereotypes in our societies be able to understand the complexity of racial representation in *Lord Jim*. What I want to argue here is that Conrad's recuperation of storytelling, troubled by its constraint in an antithetical narrative form, shapes degrees of communication that work like the concentric ripples transmitted in water by the fall of a pebble. When Marlow appeals to his audience's shared knowledge, whether that of people of the 1890s in the South-East Asian colonial space, or that of the mercantile seafaring community, otherwise called by Conrad "the fellowship of the sea,"<sup>193</sup> of their Englishness, their gentility, or perhaps merely their westernness<sup>194</sup> or their whiteness, every single reader of *Lord Jim* is appealed to in a different way, depending on whether the reader shares the values or features of identity referred to by Marlow or not. In this sense, most of Conrad's readers are oblivious to Marlow's references to the seafaring craft and require appendixes and glossaries in order to keep up with his more privileged listeners.<sup>195</sup> What cannot be overlooked, in any case, is that the expression "one of us" does not only refer to the fellowship of the sea, as Frederic Jameson argues:

But the body of men thus held together in the ideological cohesion of class values which cannot without peril be called into question is not merely the confraternity of the sea; it is the ruling class of the British Empire, the heroic bureaucracy of imperial capitalism which takes that

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<sup>193</sup> See especially on this C. F. Burgess, *The Fellowship of the Craft: Conrad on the Ships and Seamen and the Sea*. Port Washington and London: Kennikat Press, 1976.

<sup>194</sup> To find a very precise and historically grounded notion of Conrad's gradual substitution of the idea of the European for that of the Western, see Christopher GoGwilt's *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995.

<sup>195</sup> It is worth noting here how deeply troubled Conrad was about the distance between the spoken and the written word, a conflict he alludes to when he says: "An then there is that accent. Another difficulty. For who is going to tell whether the accent is right or wrong till the word is shouted, and fails to be heard, perhaps, and goes down-wind, leaving the world unmoved?" (Joseph Conrad, *A personal record*, xiv).

lesser, but sometimes even more heroic, bureaucracy of the officers of the merchant fleet as a figure for itself.<sup>196</sup>

Indeed, the mariner's code, or the fellowship of the sea, was ultimately appropriated to serve the interests of the late Victorian Empire. As Stephen Ross explains, "[b]y way of a series of acts of Parliament and amendments to those acts from 1850 through 1894, Michael Valdez Moses tells us, the mariner's code transformed what has been romanticized as an unspoken chivalric and aristocratic ethic into a rigid notion of right conduct based upon and derived from commercial considerations."<sup>197</sup> If in this community the most important element for the critic is "duty," the central figure is the English gentleman.

Accordingly, orality as a narrative device directs the concern of his listeners towards the ideal of the gentleman.<sup>198</sup> Since this is the central question that Marlow's narrative dissects through Jim's story, and since this inquiry is shaped by the contrast of racial stereotypes to their counterparts, our analysis of the remaining stereotypes will focus on their relationship with the fundamental stereotype of the gentleman, as they do not contribute independently to the story or to the general concerns of the novel. The stereotypes that depict the domain of the colonized are especially relevant in their "fonction constructive." Historically and aesthetically informed by their social and cultural context, they work principally as counterparts to the English gentleman's racial stereotype, emphasizing its racial aspect and consolidating the legitimizing grounds of its codified characteristics.

### **3. 4. Pilgrims as victims and spectators of the *Patna* incident**

Critics have identified the structure of *Lord Jim* as a two-part novel guided by the contrasted settings of the Eastern seas populated with colonizers in the first and Patusan as the territory of the uncivilized

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<sup>196</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Art*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981, 259.

<sup>197</sup> Stephen Ross, *Conrad and Empire*. Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2004, 69.

<sup>198</sup> For Robert F. Lee, "in the above, we can see the concept of 'us' defined as the clique of British, dedicated, honorable, humanistic, courageous, merchant-adventurers who bear the 'burden.'" (39)

world in the second, and by the different literary models of narrative they conduct. As noted previously, the *Patna* section focuses on a conversational mode where action is relegated to the background while reflection and judgment are foregrounded, weaving the thread of the narrative. By opposition, the Patusan section is primarily concerned with action, following a pattern of narrative very much indebted to the imperial romance, leaving therefore only scant room for reflection. This great contrast between the two parts, simultaneously serving several significant functions, also affects racial representation.

In the first part of the novel we find Marlow vehemently questioning the qualities that his audience identifies with those of a prominent seaman. Their praiseworthiness is for the most part overshadowed by their exaggeration in Jim. The result is a very ambivalent narrative where Marlow's perception of Jim, uttered in a tone between mockery and sadness, entails an overwhelming doubt that emerges from the enigma of Jim's personality and adherence to his supposed collective identity. However, as I have argued, Marlow's rendering of Jim moves towards our ultimate persuasion that he is still "one of us."

Racial elements found in this first part of the novel contribute to the idea that Jim's jump from the *Patna*, an act performed in a colonial space, could have had different consequences if performed in the home country.<sup>199</sup> The *Patna* had 800 Muslims on board who were going to Mecca on their once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage. They are the still mute racial presence of the first part of the novel. In fact they are not so: whites from other countries who are not English are also negatively portrayed in this first part, as critics have observed. But what is remarkable about the silent pilgrims is that they not only accompany Jim but they become the cause of his disgrace. The presence of the pilgrims is worked in the contrasting views of the frame narrator and Marlow's narrative. At the very beginning of the novel, when the frame narrator summarizes Jim's problematic, the focus of attention remains on the pilgrims, for a while:

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<sup>199</sup> Indeed, as Sanjay Krishman affirms "the case for Jim's exceptional status would be impossible to sustain had it been eight-hundred *European* passengers on board the *Patna*. . . . Thus the virtual deaths of the Malay pilgrims—and no one else—are necessary for the narrative to work: only the Malays provide the pre-text for an ethical dilemma whose burden of responsibility can be directed elsewhere." ("Seeing the animal: Colonial Space and Movement in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*," *Novel* 37.3, Summer 2004, 331.)

Eight hundred men and women with faith and hopes, with affections and memories, they had collected there, coming from north and south and from the outskirts of the East, after treading the jungle paths, descending the rivers, coasting in praus along the shallows, crossing in small canoes from island to island, passing through suffering, meeting strange sights, beset by strange fears, upheld by one desire. They came from solitary huts in the wilderness, from populous campongs, from villages by the sea. At the call of an idea they had left their forests, their clearings, the protection of their rulers, their prosperity, their poverty, the surroundings of their youth and the graves of their fathers. They came covered with dust, with sweat, with grime, with rags—the strong men at the head of family parties, the lean old men pressing forward without hope of return; young boys with fearless eyes glancing curiously, shy little girls with tumbled long hair; the timid women muffled up and clasping to their breasts, wrapped in loose ends of soiled head-cloths, their sleeping babies, the unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief. (13)

This sensitive human vision that ends with the image of the sleeping unconscious babies is brutally cut off by the next sentence: “‘Look at dese cattle,’ said the German skipper of his new chief mate” (14). The novel’s backing of the former perception arises from the extended passage dedicated to the prior sympathetic vision of the pilgrims and from the mocking of the German’s English pronunciation. Both the contrasting function and the central importance of the pilgrims in the novel are reinforced by the attention they are given by the frame narrator in the following chapter, in a compassionate description of the sleeping pilgrims aboard the *Patna* leading up to Jim’s opposing view of them:

Below the roof of the awnings, surrendered to the wisdom of white men and to their courage, trusting the power of their unbelief and the iron shell of their fire-ship, the pilgrims of an exacting faith slept on mats, on blankets, on bare planks, on every deck, in all the dark corners, wrapped in dyed cloths, muffled in soiled rags, with their heads resting on small bundles, with their faces pressed to bent forearms: the men, the women, the children; the old with the young, the decrepit with the lusty—all equal before sleep, death’s brother. (16)

Sleep works throughout the novel in its powerful traditional association with death to establish the connection between pilgrims and Malays as individuals belonging to “other races” and as a

metaphor suggesting their subordination to the white colonizers, whose waking state while their charges are asleep contributes to the metaphor of the worlds of sunshine/moonlight, day/night, light/darkness, life/death elaborated through the use of several symbols to contrast the world of the colonizer with that of the colonized.

The lyricism of this image, as well as the depiction of the stillness and peace of the Eastern seas, compels the reader to allow this description to linger in mind long after passing this point in the story. The scene's narration shines in its absence when Marlow and Jim's telling of the Patna episode arrives, since at the moment when Marlow is supposed to render the episode of the *Patna* the sleeping pilgrims hardly appear, and when they do, Jim's words narrate them as an extremely menacing presence, which has a shocking effect on the reader, thus far only granted a poetic image of the pilgrims. Indeed, Jim's image of the pilgrims at the moment of the collision is linked in Marlow's eyes to the extenuating panic of "the emergency" (56). Jim anxiously inquires: "Do you suppose," he said, "that I was thinking of myself, with a hundred and sixty people at my back, all fast asleep in that fore-tween-deck alone—and more of them aft; more on the deck—sleeping—knowing nothing about it—three times as many as there were boats for, even if there had been time?" (54). Though, as Tom Henthorne suggests, "to the white officers of the *Patna* the pilgrims are a threat that must be carefully controlled. . . . If the 800 pilgrims initially represent a threat by hint of numbers, after the collision there seems to be a real possibility that they will challenge whites for control of the ship and, more importantly, the lifeboats."<sup>200</sup> Jim's argumentation analyzed in the previous chapter is full of calls for sympathy for his "overwhelming sense of helplessness" faced with the "sleeping crowd" (54). Whereas this emergency situation is the chief element justifying Jim's weakness, the pilgrims' ignorance and brutality is thinly veiled in Marlow's retelling of Jim's confession:

He saw here and there a head lifted off a mat, a vague form uprise in sitting posture, listen sleepily for a moment, sink down again into the billowy confusion of boxes, steam-winch, ventilators. He was aware all these people did not know enough to take intelligent notice of that

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<sup>200</sup> Tom Henthorne, "An End to Imperialism: *Lord Jim* and the Postcolonial Conrad," *Conradiana* 32.2 (Fall 2000): 208. See also his book *Conrad's Trojan Horses: Imperialism, Hybridity, & the Postcolonial Aesthetic* (Lubbock: Texas Tech UP, 2008), especially his chapter "'The Onlookers See Most of the Game': Marlow, Jim, and Postcolonial Patusan."

strange noise. The ship of iron, the men with white faces, all the sights, all the sounds, everything on board to that ignorant and pious multitude was strange alike, and as trustworthy as it would for ever remain incomprehensible. It occurred to him that the fact was fortunate. The idea of it was simply terrible. (55)

Not long after this declaration, Marlow's persuasion that Jim's exculpation is merited helps in the rhetorical appeal to the audience's own experience, welcoming the old argument of the white man's burden of responsibility towards 'brutes': "Which of us here has not observed this, or maybe experienced something of that feeling in his own person—this extreme weariness of emotions, the vanity of effort, the yearning for rest? Those striving with unreasonable forces know it well—the shipwrecked castaways in boats, wanderers lost in a desert, men battling against the unthinking might of nature, or the stupid brutality of crowds" (56). Given his previous insistent use of the word "crowd" to refer to the pilgrims, Marlow's generalization implies a reference to this group. Since this passage concludes the chapter, attention is drawn to this general forgiveness.

Chapter VIII narrates the episode of an awakened pilgrim desperately asking for some water for his child, which Jim misinterprets in a moment of panic and in response to which he "slung a lamp in his face" and "had half throttled him" before making out what he wanted (57). This 'resort' to violence is a 'preventive' solution that arises in a moment of extreme tension, the do-or-die situations that the *Judea* displays as its motto on its hull, and that the Marlow of *Youth* identifies as a distinguishing feature of the craft. The racialisation of this episode bursts into the story as a strategy that demonstrates the use of racial boundaries in narrative to heighten the level of extraordinary moral conflict for the individual. It is precisely and literally in this sense that we can talk about the pilgrims as victims of the white's "siege mentality."<sup>201</sup>

Reference to the pilgrims only has value when related to Jim's experience, and even then these characters are like an immobile mass of people only useful as a painted backdrop. Such is the use of the pilgrim motif when Marlow tries to convince the reader of Jim's intense feeling of guilt: "I believe that, in this first moment, his heart

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<sup>201</sup> I am going to discuss this concept when referring to the "white mind" of the South of the United States.

was wrung with all the suffering, that his soul knew the accumulated savour of all the fear, all the horror, all the despair of eight hundred human beings pounced upon in the night by a sudden and violent death, else why should he have said, ‘It seemed to me that I must jump out of that accursed boat and swim back to see—half a mile—more—any distance—to the very spot . . . ?’” (71).

In contrast to the frame narrator’s lengthy depiction of the pilgrims in what are his only four chapters as narrator, Marlow’s references to the group are minimal, lateral, and serve as a backdrop for the jump and its indirect cause. They are clearly as unimportant as they are to Brierly, so that this seems to be a general attitude within the craft that is questioned to a certain extent by the frame narrator. Compared to the racist white crew of the *Patna*, Jim appears even quite concerned about the pilgrims;<sup>202</sup> yet his action, his jump, has exactly the same consequences as the actions of those who abandoned ship as a result of their convictions. Jim’s contempt for the other European members of the crew reinforces his Englishness at the same time as it allows him to appear more righteous. The most racist epithets such as “brutes” (65) or “niggers” (58) or “toads” (chapter V) are not uttered by Jim or any other Englishman in this episode. In the first part of the novel, Jim’s awareness of his deed distances him—in part through his rhetorical emphasis on it—from the other wicked white Europeans. In his intelligent *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, Ian Watt traces Conrad’s historical source for the *Patna* episode, drawing our attention to the main transformations in the process of fictionalizing. In particular the internationalization of the *Patna* crew, no longer exclusively British but one including German, French, and British members, along with other changes, plays an important role in shifting the focus to Jim, making his “desertion much more difficult to justify.” Yet, at the same time his singling out “emphasizes his sense of duty, his superiority to the other officers, and the puzzle of his final jump” (266). Jim’s national distinction from the other officers reflects the racial hierarchy among whites. Though the British character betrays the standard of conduct expected of him by sharing in the common failure with the other whites of the ship, he nonetheless remains safe from absolute disapproval.

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<sup>202</sup> Consider Jim’s words here: “There were eight hundred people in that ship,’ he said impaling me to the back of my seat with an awful blank stare. ‘Eight hundred living people, and they [rest of the white crew] were yelling after the one dead man to come down and be saved’” (69).

A further step might be suggested by Gene M. Moore's view on the function in the novel of the absence of the large crew of a steamboat such as the *Patna*. In Moore's opinion, the non-depiction of the logical amount of people needed to make the *Patna* work is analogous to the absence of the Malays' individuation in Patusan. Both "fail to capture the serious attention of both Jim and Marlow [which] is symptomatic of the dreamlike and light-literary atmosphere that prevents European officers and gentlemen from fully appreciating the reality of non-white, ungentlemanly work."<sup>203</sup>

Something similar takes place in another narrative frame, in the contrast between Marlow's and the privileged man's racial ideas, when Marlow recalls his words in the letter he sends to the privileged man:

You said also—I call to mind—that 'giving your life up to them' (*them* meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow, or black in colour) 'was like selling your soul to a brute.' You contended that 'that kind of thing' was only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially your own, in whose name are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress. (201).

Indeed, the extreme racism reflected in the privileged reader's statements overshadows Marlow and Jim's treatment of the pilgrims. This is one of the reasons that illustrate the subtlety of the treatment of racial issues in *Lord Jim* in comparison to other novels such as *Heart of Darkness*.<sup>204</sup>

The pilgrims are victims of the whites' despair and ignorant spectators of their appalling behavior. Their function in *Lord Jim* is mainly to work as a symptom of the huge distance between the image Jim and Marlow

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<sup>203</sup> "The Missing Crew of the *Patna*," *Lord Jim: Centennial Essays* 97. Moore's contrast of the *Patna* crew to that of the *Jeddab* is especially interesting in historical terms.

<sup>204</sup> David Simpson acknowledges this distinction too: "The racism of the crew of the *Patna*, or of Captain Robinson in his readiness to drive coolies to the death to exploit guano on lonely islands (*LJ*, ch. 14, p. 166), or of Shomberg and Ricardo in their view of life as a 'play of shadows the dominant race could walk through unaffected and disregarded in the pursuit of its incomprehensible aims and needs' (*V2*, ch. 8, p. 167), is of the cruder sort. But there is more than a hint of a more sophisticated and romantic racial idealism in Marlow's memory of Jim as a 'tiny white speck, that seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world' (*LJ*, ch. 35, p. 336), especially when it is set in the context of his mystified view of the relation of commerce and moral imagination." (*Fetishism and Imagination: Dickens, Melville, Conrad*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982, 98.)

try to render to their audiences and Jim's much more equivocal personality. His treatment of the pilgrims shows both his bitter contempt and his aggressive attitude. If this is the pilgrims' relationship to Jim's individual identity, in regard to the collective standards of conduct shaped by the racial discourse underpinning Imperial propaganda, the pilgrims provide the proper contrast that heightens the racial dimension of the episode and the questioning of whiteness incarnated in gentility. Jim's guilt, as it has previously been argued, at times does not seem to have a moral essence but a public one, for he is worried about people's opinions, something he has in common with Brierly. The disavowal of the pilgrims by all the characters, except for the frame narrator, suggests that their deaths would have been much more serious if they had been white. At the same time, however, the "natives" become witnesses to the waning of the standard of conduct that had enthroned whiteness and gentility in the British imperial discourse. Their presence is what threatens its power and, as Hillis Miller puts it, "[i]f there is no sovereign power enthroned in the fixed standard of conduct then the standard is without validity. It is an all-too-human fiction, an arbitrary code of behavior—'this precious notion of a convention,' as Marlow says, 'only one of the rules of the game, nothing more'."<sup>205</sup>

The pilgrims' sleep, like that of King Duncan, exacerbates Jim's cowardice. Macbeth's words find an echo in Jim's story at this point:

Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more;  
 Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep,  
 Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,  
 The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
 Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
 Chief nourisher in life's feast.'  
 . . .  
 Still it cried 'Sleep no more' to all the house:  
 'Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
 Shall sleep no more—Macbeth shall sleep no more.'<sup>206</sup>

The pilgrims' sleep alludes to unawareness, to blindness, to ignorance, to trustfulness, to submission, to mute beings, to animals, to a "human cargo," and to death. All these cultural connotations are transferred to

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<sup>205</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "Lord Jim: Repetition as Subversion of Organic Form," in his *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982, 28.

<sup>206</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990, 128.

the stereotype of other individuals not only defined by their religion but by their race, the Malays. In this transference, which shows the flexibility of the stereotypes in their borrowing of abstract categories that can be applied to anyone Other than white in general and Anglo-Saxon here, the pilgrims pass the baton both to the Muslim Bugis of the *Patna* section frequently captured in the telling while they sleep, and to the wretched Malay Muslims ruled by the Rajah Allang and the Sherif Ali. In this sense, the pilgrims in the first part concentrate Islam and all the connotations of sleep in its connection to the colonized world, which will be split in the narrative of Patusan so that the effect of racial issues can be diversified and intensified.<sup>207</sup>

Finally, if we observe the progression of the stereotype of the Other as portrayed in the pilgrims, the negation toward which the reader is lead is clear. This effect is forcefully constructed through the narrative subordination of the pilgrims' role in the story and the fact that they merit the least attention from Marlow's voice, which reproduces what also seems to be Jim's contempt for the "crowd." Their neglect in the portrayal of the pilgrims, and their different tone in comparison with the frame narrator's attention, has the double effect of suggesting Marlow and Jim's eroded credibility and of extenuating Jim's transgression, since the pilgrims are scarcely represented and their stillness freezes them in a mute scenery that allows the spotlight to fall on Jim's emotional distress at the moment of jumping.

### **3. 5. Malays: a general view of the stereotype of the Other as a racial mirror**

As Hampson notes in his book *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*, "Malaysia" is a very confusing term that indicates different spaces in the vicinity of the Malay Peninsula. To make our references to the Malays and Malaysia clearer, I will assume Hampson's definition of the term:

In using the term 'Malaysia,' I am thinking less of this complicated political history than of the earlier currency of the term. 'Malaysia' seems to have been coined in the 1830s and was in general use in England by the end of the nineteenth century to describe 'a

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<sup>207</sup> On this topic see, John Lester, *Conrad and Religion*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1988.

geographic-zoological-botanical region comprising the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, Borneo, Sumatra, and Java. . . . The 'Malaysia' of Conrad's Malayan fiction stretches from Singapore to Bali, from Achin to New Guinea, from Sourabaya to Manila. However, its centre is the island of Borneo. (14)

However indebted to his personal experience, Conrad's Malays in *Lord Jim* seem to be what blacks were in the common imaginary of Victorian society. Their stereotypes in the novel show their intrinsic flexibility since many traditionally shaped stereotypes are freely and—I dare say—arbitrarily combined in the novel. By arbitrarily I mean that they could have been easily interchanged while performing the same functions. Characters as such are mostly flat, and indecisive in the plot, which in turn depends almost exclusively on Jim's actions. In contrast to the African context as a space for the imagery of the encounter of whites and the other races, the South Eastern scenery usually reflects a much more benevolent attitude than that expressed towards Africa. Indeed, Conrad's portrayal of the Malay fits the traditional pattern of benevolence which, notwithstanding an element of menace that empowers the actions of the colonizer, finds in the Malay a loyal and discrete subordinate.<sup>208</sup>

The Malays perform different functions in the *Patna* and Patusan sections. The two people in charge of the wheel were Malays who witness every single movement of the white crew. They are placed in that particular position to intensify the silent presence of the spectators of the unsettling of the white ideals. Their role as witnesses to the novel's enigma is already present in the first rendering of them: "The eyes of the two Malays at the wheel glittered towards the white men, but their dark hands remained closed on the spokes" (21).<sup>209</sup> Marlow's report of the Inquiry is also preceded by his amazement at the Malays helmsmen's attitude: "Not the least wonder of these twenty minutes, to my mind, is the behaviour of the two helmsmen. They were amongst the native batch of all sorts brought over from Aden to give evidence at the inquiry. One of them labouring under intense bashfulness, was very young, and with his smooth, yellow, cheery countenance looked even younger than he was" (62). Childhood as the main feature of the "Bon sauvage" stereotype of the Other is already

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<sup>208</sup> See here D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, "Conrad's Malayan Novels: Problems of Authenticity." *Joseph Conrad: Third World Perspectives* 39-58.

<sup>209</sup> Their next appearance will focus on their same look though Marlow includes Jim in the same attitude (61).

suggested here as well as inferior intelligence, for when the question “what he thought of it at the time” is put to the helmsman it is reported that “He says he thought nothing” (62). This Malay’s only contribution as a witness in the novel is to say “nothing.” The effect of this silence is reinforced by the fact that the latter line stands alone in the text, and a preceding dash indicating the seconds of hushed expectancy while the audience waits for what should have been the most dissenting version of the story. The second witness’s testimony is no less striking:

The other with patient blinking eyes, a blue cotton handkerchief, faded with much washing, bound with a smart twist over a lot of grey wisps, his face shrunk into grim hollows, his brown skin made darker by a mesh of wrinkles, explained that he had a knowledge of some evil thing befalling the ship, but there had been no order; he could not remember an order; why should he leave the helm? To some further questions he jerked back his spare shoulders, and declared it never came into his mind then that the white men were about to leave the ship through fear of death. He did not believe it now. There might have been secret reasons. He wagged his old chin knowingly. Aha! Secret reasons. He was a man of great experience, and he wanted *that* white Tuan to know—he turned towards Brierly, who didn’t raise his head—that he had acquired a knowledge of many things by serving white men on the sea for a great number of years—and, suddenly, with shaky excitement he poured upon our spellbound attention a lot of queersounding names, names of dead-and-gone skippers, names of forgotten country ships, names of familiar and distorted sound, as if the hand of dumb time had been at work on them for ages. They stopped him at last. (62)

Apart from Marlow’s unpleasant physical description of the subject, the report of the helmsman disappoints the expectations of another version of the story, that of the other “races” as privileged witnesses who could actually menace the power of the prescribed standard of conduct. Brierly’s fears that the uncovered evidence of the code’s weakness would be apparent to the “natives” are calmed by the native witness’ stupidity and the irony of his boundless trust in the standard of conduct—the instability of which he does not acknowledge even when it is displayed before his eyes. The stereotype of the Other as a witness whose ability to judge the white man’s actions in the colonized world is impeded by his/her dullness prevents the exploration of other versions that would offer a contrast to Jim’s telling of his own story, which in turn is supported by Marlow’s narrative. The only alternative

voice that is invested with any authority is the frame narrator, whose critical eye—bestowed by his apparent belonging in the white realm—is not necessarily as powerful as that of a direct witness of the victimized other “race.” In this sense, the latter’s inferiority in terms of intelligence as the main feature of the general stereotype of the Other—borrowed from that of the “Negro”—has the effect of inhibiting the telling of the moral conduct of the white crew in the British Merchant Marine from another perspective based on personal experience. Therefore, the Malays are afforded a privileged view of the *Patna* incident that is nevertheless not articulated into a critical discourse of imperialism and whiteness which Brierly fears would breach existing power relations.

The Malays’ ignorance will be persistently emphasized in Patusan, shaping the stereotype of the noble savage who, unable to understand his own reality—not to mention that of the civilized world—sees the white man as his idyllic stereotype dictates. The only function of this clamorous ignorance is the elevation of Jim who, although he has become an outcast in his own world, has found in Patusan the space for his glorification and fashioning into a hero of an imperial romance. Both Jim and Marlow contribute to this portrayal by pointing out the Malays’ adherence to a mythical structure of thought that places Jim at the centre once he gains the people’s confidence. The Malays’ ignorance in their construction of legends about Jim is the object of scornful commentary: “What can you do with such silly beggars? They will sit up half the night talking bally rot, and the greater the lie the more they seem to like it. . . . The earnestness of his denials was amusing, and at last I said, ‘My dear fellow, you don’t suppose *I* believe this [the legend].’ He looked quite startled. ‘Well, no! I suppose not,’ he said, and burst into a Homeric peal of laughter” (160). Marlow’s derision does not render him immune from sharing in the Malays’ incapacity to understand, as we are going to see in his attitude towards Jewel.<sup>210</sup>

In this sense, the Malay helmsmen function as a transition to verisimilitude, for the apparent confirmation of their ignorance as a fact witnessed by a wide audience confers new credence upon Marlow and Jim’s references to the Malays’ misunderstanding and confusion, a

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<sup>210</sup> There is another similar legend that merits similar attention: “The popular story has it that Jim with a touch of one finger had thrown down the gate. He was, of course, anxious to disclaim this achievement.” (161)

depiction that is thus reinforced by escaping from Jim's subjective perception. There is a gradation of understanding that, as in general racial discourse, depends on racial difference. As a matter of fact, half-castes—those with some white blood—have some capacity to understand, which is mainly demonstrated by their use of English in their more extensive communication with whites. This is clearly defined in *Lord Jim* as it is also in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Nonetheless, the greatest presence of the Malays and those sometimes referred to in the novel as “natives” is found in Patusan. In the telling of the last scene of his visit to Patusan, Marlow provides us with a tableau of characters, “like a picture created by fancy on a canvas” (196), fairly sketched in accordance with their development throughout the previous episodes:

But as to what I was leaving behind, I cannot imagine any alteration. The immense and magnanimous Doramin and his little motherly witch of a wife, gazing together upon the land and nursing secretly their dreams of parental ambition; Tunku Allang, wizened and greatly perplexed; Dain Waris, intelligent and brave, with his faith in Jim, with his firm glance and his ironic friendliness; the girl, absorbed in her frightened, suspicious adoration; Tamb' Itam, surly and faithful; Cornelius, leaning his forehead against the fence under the moonlight—I am certain of them. They exist as under an enchanter's wand. (196)

From this frozen recollection in tranquility of still lives we are rendered the whole story of Patusan. Marlow steps back from his last image of the country to unfold the characters in his repeated storytelling. But the characters are as still as Patusan's landscape, and they remain “in the memory motionless, unfaded, with its life arrested, in an unchanging light.” The emotions, “the ambitions, the fears, the hate, the hopes, . . . they remain in my mind just as I had seen them—intense and as if for ever suspended in their expression.” Patusan is therefore condemned by memory to that state of permanence, out of time. Meanwhile, by contrast to the memory's arrest of time, Marlow's trip back home restarts the movement intrinsic to “the world where events move, men change, light flickers, life flows in a clear stream, no matter whether over mud or over stones.” If those Patusani wax figures exist under “an enchanter's wand”—Marlow's, indeed—“the figure round which all these are grouped—that one lives, and I am not

certain of him. No magician's wand can immobilise him under my eyes. He is one of us" (196).

Marlow's explicitness in drawing an antagonism will not be found in Faulkner's narrators, yet it does not minimize its effectiveness. However clear his ideas about the contrast between the colonial space of Patusan and that other world of his own, the certainty of the storyteller is challenged when he focuses on a member of his own community who, nevertheless, unfolds an unexpected complexity. Marlow attributes Jim's personality at this point to his belonging to a much more complex world which cannot even be fixed by the memory's power to stop time and structure the past into pictures.<sup>211</sup> It is the condition of a telling dependent on memory that explains the different treatment of both worlds, that of Patusan as well as the one where the "we" of the narrative belongs. Memory can produce a single fresh canvas of Patusan but demands much more space and many more words to remember a figure that, however flawed, remains a part of the community. Its uncertainty, its enigma, demands a longer tale. In this sense, Marlow's personal interest in Jim, along with that of his community of listeners, is reinforced by his conception of how memory works and how remembering is pre-determined by the spaces and the people recalled.<sup>212</sup> This distinction in essence is translated in the narrative by the use of round and flat characters. While it is obvious that other flat characters exist in the part dedicated to the *Patna* incident, it is remarkable that most of them, who live together with Jim not for the duration of a single sea voyage but for years, appear in the second part only sketchily described, without a voice, or not evolving as round characters do. An efficient way of drawing flat characters who would at the same time be identifiable and support the construction of the main character is, precisely, to adhere to stereotypes. Since the epistemological division corresponds to racial lines, resorting to racial stereotypes that have the benefit of popular acceptance seems only logical.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Sanjay Krishnan argues that "It is Jim's 'inward pain' that makes his life narratable and, conversely, the natives not narratable in Marlow's eyes. If inferiority is indissolubly linked to historical being, it is the *sine qua non* of narrative value." (330)

<sup>212</sup> For a reflection on writing as remembrance in *Lord Jim* see Mark Conroy's "Colonial-Fashioning in Conrad: Writing and Remembrance in *Lord Jim*." *L'Époque Conradianne* 19 (1993): 25-36.

<sup>213</sup> For an overview of Conrad's relation to the orientalist discourse, see Reynold Humphries, "The Discourse of Colonialism: Its Meaning and Relevance for Conrad's Fiction." *Conradiana* 21.2 (1989): 107-133.

After voicing some doubts about the figure of the colonizers and introducing some historical data about Patusan in chapter XXI, Marlow starts his narrative of Jim's last two years in that country with the episode of Jim and Marlow's visit to the Rajah Allang—about whom all the information at his disposal at the time was acquired from Stein, mainly his name and a brief sketch of his life and character. Rajah Allang's nephew is a good representative of his family's appearance and behavior: "The Sultan is an imbecile youth with two thumbs on his left hand and an uncertain and beggarly revenue extorted from a miserable population and stolen from him by his many uncles" (137). Rahaj Allang was one of the belligerent forces in Patusan, "the worst of the Sultan's uncles, the governor of the river, who did the extorting and the stealing, and ground down to the point of extinction the country-born Malays, who, utterly defenceless, had not even the resource of emigrating" (138). Marlow describes him when he and Jim "paid him a visit of ceremony" as "a dirty, little, used-up old man with evil eyes and a weak mouth, who swallowed an opium pill every two hours, and in defiance of common decency wore his hair uncovered and falling in a wild stingy locks about his wizened grimy face" (138). This reception scene delineates his physical appearance in accordance with his character and actions in such a way that the character does not give rise to any hint of doubt, but appears unambiguously in Marlow's memories: "When giving audience he would clamber upon a sort of narrow stage erected in a hall like a ruinous barn with a rotten bamboo floor, through the cracks of which you could see, twelve or fifteen feet below, the heaps of refuse and garbage of all kinds lying under the house" (138). If this is revolting enough, his wickedness is further clarified by the fact that Jim risks being poisoned by the Rajah's coffee every time he visits.

The Rajah is surrounded by around forty people who contribute to the threatening environment that Rajah Allang creates in the narrative with their "movement, coming and going, pushing and murmuring, at our backs." Their appearance is just as shabby, though less aggressive: "The majority, slaves and humble dependants, were half naked, in ragged sarong, dirty with ashes and mud-stains" (138). Yet just in case the reader misses the contrast between Jim's clean and bright attire and the Rajah and his dependants and slaves' dirty and ragged looks, Marlow provides a reminder: "In the midst of these dark-faced men, his stalwart figure in white apparel, the gleaming clusters of his fair

hair, seemed to catch all the sunshine that trickled through the cracks in the closed shutters of that dim hall, with its walls of mats and a roof of thatch.” This stark contrast sets the scene for his major claim that “He appeared like a creature not only of another kind but of another essence. Had they not seen him come up in a canoe they might have thought he had descended upon them from the clouds” (138). Needless is to say that Marlow’s tone is as ironic as it can be, thereby serving as a parody of the adventure novel, whose conventions rather seemed not to apply to Jim. Yet however often this tone recurs, no concessions are made to the depiction of the Malays that could open the way to a counter-narrative: the Malays’ thoughts on Jim are not heard here. Filtered by Marlow, the Malays’ perceived thoughts are imposed on the reader as a form of their misunderstanding.

Rajah Allang pretends to hold a monopoly on trade, “but his idea of trading was indistinguishable from the commonest forms of robbery. His cruelty and rapacity had no other bounds than his cowardice” (155). As Richard Ruppel suggests “the cruel, corrupt, and contemptible Oriental despot is another persistent trope. . . . The Rajah Tanku [sic] Allang meets the qualifications of the Oriental despot as fully as Dain Waris meets those of the faithful intermediate. Indeed, Conrad seems to have delighted in exaggerating the figure until the Rajah very neatly becomes a parody of the trope.” Marlow’s description of the Rajah is prototypical when compared to other “oriental rulers” that “were often like this in turn-of the century stories and in the popular press; they indulged in every vice, ruled incompetently, and imposed extortionate taxes on their long-suffering people.”<sup>214</sup>

The figure of a white man who becomes the ruler of a “native country” was widely represented in literature—most famously by Kipling—yet there was some basis for this in historical fact in Conrad’s case, given the profound influence on his work of the biography of James Brooke (1803-1868), the Englishman who became the Rajah of Sarawak in 1841. Many details of Brooke’s life are revived in Conrad’s novel, including the imbecile Sultan with “two thumbs on

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<sup>214</sup> Richard Ruppel, “‘They always leave us’: *Lord Jim*, colonialist discourse, and Conrad’s magic naturalism.” *Studies in the Novel* 30.1 (Spring 1998): 53.

his left hand” mentioned above, whose origins in Brooke’s narrative are noted by Robert Hampson.<sup>215</sup>

Rajah Allang works as a constant threat that puts Jim in danger as long as he wants to continue ruling Patusan. He imprisons Jim once he gets to Patusan, though our hero manages to escape with two subsequent leaps, first of the stockade followed by a jump across the muddy creek, both successful. His leaps revive the image of his original escape and, apart from contributing to the shaping of the adventure story, they help to invert the meaning of Jim’s jumps in a much more positive way. The Rajah Allang therefore stands out as the fiercest ruler of the unknown colonial territory following what seems very much like the cruel, savage Negro stereotype. However, Jim’s power is finally tolerated because, in Jim’s opinion, “most likely, he is afraid of me because I am not afraid of his coffee” (151). Jim’s courage and intelligence therefore cast their light on his clearly dominant position in Patusan.

Conrad works to depict the politically complex situation in Borneo between the Bugis, the Malay and the streams of new immigrants, all in constant competition with each other. The Bugis were a trader

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<sup>215</sup> Further references to Conrad’s historical sources will be made later, but this particular one can be found in Robert Hampson, *Cross-cultural Encounters* 140. Although I will mention Rajah James Brooke later, it is worth introducing here an anecdote of his life which the reader’s fresh memory of Jim’s jump and his further adventures in the setting of Patusan will easily correlate to. Like Jim, James Brooke resigned before going to Borneo from the East India Company, a fact that J. H. Walker says “remains a mystery.” The author suggests in regards to the case: “St John claimed that James had become friendly with the *Castle Huntley’s* officers, who so excited his desire to see the countries of the Far East, that he used the time constraints as an excuse. Some deeper story, however, has been concealed. . . . Whether Marryat referred to affairs of the heart or of honour or both, it might explain why Brooke was never again comfortable in society and be the cause of the ‘over-sensitiveness [that] made him shun it.’ Although we cannot be certain of Marryat’s meaning, it appears that Brooke became romantically involved, successively, with three members of the *Castle Huntley’s* crew” (*Power and Prowess: The Origins of Brooke Kingship in Saravak*. Crows Nest and Honolulu: Allen & Unwin and U of Hawai’i P, 2002, 34). In spite of the fact that Conrad probably did not know Brooke’s story to that level of detail, there is a parallel between of the latter’s resignation from the British Company in India resembles Jim’s from the British Merchant Marine, and how this issue relegates the individuals to uncomfortable social situations in which rumor plays an important role, as well as that in the case of Brooke his resignation might be associated to homosexuality, a theme certainly inscribed in the relationship between Marlow and Jim.

community who organized a maritime empire that connected Eastern ports with some colonial commercial routes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They adapted very well to the economic and political changes of the Malay Archipelago and, “although the foundation of Singapore in 1819 weakened the position of the Bugis establishment at Pontianak in west Borneo, instead of producing political disintegration or extensive piracy (which seems to have been the response of the ‘sea people’ of the Riau archipelago), this led to Bugis settlements such as that at Kutai in east Borneo developing trade with Singapore” (Hampson 40). Hampson cites documents written by colonizers that accuse the Bugis of “piracy,” but makes it clear that very influential officers such as Raffles “take a positive attitude towards the Bugis and the Malays,” as Brooke also does (59, 66).<sup>216</sup> That is, indeed, their general description in *Lord Jim*. Among the Bugis of Patusan we find the most “noble” figures that would accompany and trust Jim, becoming the very foundation of his power. In the particular reporting style Marlow employs that leave no clues for the reader as to whether he is reporting Jim’s words or if he is responsible for what he says, the narrator is led to believe about the Bugis that “[t]he men of that race are intelligent, enterprising, revengeful, but with a more frank courage than the other Malays, and restless under oppression” (154).

Two clear examples help the reader acknowledge the stereotype of the noble savage, or the colonizer’s loyal friend, so prototypical not only of the adventure novel but also of Victorian racial imagery. When Jim first arrives in Patusan, after falling into a muddy creek from which he rises from his own ashes like a Phoenix to become a young hero, he is laid on a bed to be cured and is “received, in a manner of speaking, into the heart of the community” after showing them Stein’s token. Jim’s first vision of the Bugis’ chief Doramin contrasts with that previous one of Rajah Allang, establishing from the beginning, through their differences in welcoming the white man, who the allies are and who on the other hand will need to be defeated or controlled in the future. Doramin first appears as “a large man sitting massively in a chair in the midst of the greatest possible commotion and excitement,” he “was only of the *nakboda* or merchant class, but the respect shown to him and the dignity of his bearing were very striking. He was the chief of the second power in Patusan. The immigrants

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<sup>216</sup> See here Sir. Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The history of Java*. 1817. London: J. Murray, 1830-44. 2 vols.

from Celebes (about sixty families that, with dependants and so on, could muster some two hundred men ‘wearing the kriss’) had elected him years ago for their head” (154). However, Doramin was rather old and possessed neither the energy nor the power to lead the youngsters determined to “get Sherif Ali with his wild men and drive the Rajah Allang out of the country” (155).

Doramin’s restricted movements due to his age and, in Marlow’s words, his likeness to a “cunning old elephant” help to operate his practical substitution as ruler. He “had an unbounded confidence in Tuan Jim’s wisdom” but he “cherished the hope of yet seeing his son ruler of Patusan,” something he was anxious about though he believed that “[t]he land remains where God had put it, but white men—he said—they come to us and in a little while they go. They go away. Those they leave behind do not know when to look for their return. They go to their own land, to their people, and so this white man too would . . .” (164) —prompting Marlow to answer with a “No, no.” Nevertheless, Doramin shows his faith in Jim’s decisions. He backs Jim’s last, fateful resolution for he “said that there was no more reading of hearts than touching the sky with the hand, but—he consented” (233). His superiority over the rest of the Bugis is manifested here in his doubts regarding the others’ blind trust as they gave their opinions about Jim’s decision: “‘It is the best,’ and so on. But most of them simply said that they ‘believed Tuan Jim’” (233). However, his personal interests and his preoccupation with the good of his country never disrupt Jim’s role as governor. Doramin’s last demonstration of power—until the very end modulated by Jim—is when he personally kills the white Tuan, in what can even be interpreted as a suicide in its connection to Brierly’s ending, also resulting from his moral fears. In this tense moment Marlow describes Doramin, who could not lift his head, like this:

The unwieldy old man, lowering his big forehead like an ox under a yoke, made an effort to rise, clutching at the flintlock pistols on his knees. From his throat came gurgling, choking, inhuman sounds, and his two attendants helped him from behind. . . . Doramin, struggling to keep his feet, made with his two supporters a swaying, tottering group; his little eyes stared with an expression of mad pain, of rage, with a ferocious glitter, which the bystanders noted, and then, while Jim stood stiffened and with bared head in the light of torches, looking him straight in the face, he clung heavily with his left arm

round the neck of a bowed youth, and lifting deliberately his right, shot his son's friend through the chest. (246)

Although Doramin's "inhuman sounds," as well as his comparisons to an elephant and an ox, could be read as the typical animalization of the colonized—and they probably do partake in this categorization—it is obvious that Doramin retains some power, subordinated to Jim but dignified until the very end. His narrative function here, activating the stereotype of the benevolent yet intelligent "native ruler," reinforces Jim's heroism. His steadfast trustfulness turns out to be wrong, but Jim's good intentions have not vanished with his mistake as suggested by the tragic turn of events.

Doramin appears in Marlow's mind and Jim's descriptions accompanied by his wife. Marlow thinks Jim "seemed to have a great liking for Doramin's old wife," who even more than Doramin had taken "a motherly fancy to him." Her general description is kind, for she is portrayed as having a "round, nutbrown, soft face, all fine wrinkles, large, bright red lips (she chewed betel assiduously), and screwed up, winking, benevolent eyes." However, she kept her distance from her daughters, subordinates and slaves. She was "spare," "uttered homely shrewd sayings, was of noble birth, and was eccentric and arbitrary" (155). In what seems to be Jim's description of her as reported by Marlow, the couple is preserved in an affectionate image: "They were wonderfully contrasted: she, light, delicate, spare, quick, a little witch-like, with a touch of motherly fussiness in her repose; he, facing her, immense and heavy, like a figure of a man roughly fashioned of stone, with something magnanimous and ruthless in his immobility" (156). Marlow sticks with this depiction of her as a "little motherly witch" when they meet again (164) and leaves the reader with that impression of her in his last petrified rendering. For Linda Dryden, she "is described with the condescending affection reserved for mothers, particularly 'native' mothers, in the romance."<sup>217</sup>

Dain Waris is depicted not only benevolently but also admiringly. He captivates Marlow because of his European character features, which allow Marlow's narration to subscribe to an explicitly racial hierarchy

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<sup>217</sup> Lynda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*. London and New York: MacMillan Press LTD and St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000, 169.

common at the times.<sup>218</sup> He is first described in the act of rendering “indescribable” and “profound respect” (156), which will prove his loyalty. In the transition from the description of Doramin to Dain Waris we find the latter’s first remarkable feature, trust: “Without the weight of Doramin’s authority, and his son fiery enthusiasm, he would have failed. Dain Waris, the distinguished youth, was the first to believe in him.” This develops into an “interracial” friendship: “theirs was one of those strange, profound, rare friendships between brown and white, in which the very difference of race seems to draw two human beings closer by some mystic element of sympathy.” Immediately afterwards, his qualities are acknowledged to belong to a standard racial stereotype already familiar to most readers: “Of Dain Waris, his own people said with pride that he knew how to fight like a white man. This was true; he had that sort of courage—the courage in the open, I may say, —but he had also a European mind. You meet them sometimes like that, and are surprised to discover unexpectedly a familiar turn of thought, an unobscured vision, a tenacity of purpose, a touch of altruism” (157).

Needless to say that by remarking upon those qualities Marlow is drawing the counter-stereotype through negation of Malays who do not match Dain Waris’ very European qualities. The stereotype in his figure works not only to paint an admirable and therefore positive vision of a single Malay, but also by pointing to its inverse, an absent and negative counter-stereotype that applies, paradoxically, to the “crowd.” The paradox lies in the fact that those who are singularized deserve extensive recognition and lengthy descriptions, while the mass is portrayed only through its negation of that specific character’s individuation. However, this process of individuation that could seem rather uncommon and might suggest the construction of a round character draws on another stereotype from imperial literature, that of the native friend who accompanies the hero in his quest.

Dain Waris’ physical description follows this pattern of character building based upon admiration, in a description that reminds us of the ideal man:

Of small stature, but admirably well proportionate, Dain Waris had a proud carriage, a polished, easy bearing, a temperament like a clear

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<sup>218</sup> See here a parallel brief observation in Véronique Pauly, “Responsibility and otherness in Conrad’s *Lord Jim*.” *L’Époque Conradianne* 25 (1999): 96.

flame. His dusky face, with big black eyes, was in action expressive, and in repose thoughtful. He was of a silent disposition; a firm glance, an ironic smile, a courteous deliberation of manner seemed to hint at great reserves of intelligence and power.” (157)

Yet this physical description, as much as his character, contains certain markers pointed out by Marlow and which reveal Dain Waris’ “colonial mimicry” from Marlow’s perspective, or as Bhabha defines it, “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*”<sup>219</sup> Marlow will indeed remind us that this character is “not quite” ‘us’, in the crucial moment when Brown has entered Patusan while Jim is away, in a passage that stands out for its condensation of racial discourse deployed throughout the Patusan story and just prior to the great catastrophe:

That brave and intelligent youth (‘who knew how to fight after the manner of white men’) wished to settle the business off-hand, but his people were too much for him. He had not Jim’s racial prestige and the reputation of invincible, supernatural power. He was not the visible, tangible incarnation of unfailing truth and of unfailing victory. Beloved, trusted, and admired as he was, he was still one of *them*, while Jim was one of *us*. Moreover, the white man, a tower of strength in himself, was invulnerable, while Dain Waris could be killed. (214)

His earthly nature is opposed to the white’s divinity in the minds of the Malay, which will prove to be wrong, but which simultaneously fixes the stereotype of the general “ignorance” of the colonized and endorses the racist colonial discourse.

The singularizing of an intelligent character who develops a friendship with the white colonizer and who helps provide him with the local knowledge necessary for his triumph over the population, ironically creates an opportunity to criticize subtly without causing too much damage, in what is aiming to appear as a reflective acknowledgment of the world’s epistemological complexity, as Marlow observes: “Such beings open to the Western eye, so often concerned with mere surfaces, the hidden possibilities of races and lands over which hangs the mystery of unrecorded ages. He not only trusted him, he understood him, I firmly believe” (157). Thus the stereotype of the “native” hero’s friend, in concentrating benevolence and his superior,

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<sup>219</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse.” *The Location of Culture*. Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2004, 122.

rare qualities casts a shadow that is its negative multitudinous pole, which has no purpose but to affirm “western” racial perceptions.

As Linda Dryden asserts “the native subject of imperial romance and adventure is a simple soul, trusting the superior moral, political, and cultural power attributed to the white hero. If the hero has a ‘native’ friend that friend is adopted by virtue of his or her status as a ‘noble savage’” (40). Indeed, “the black sidekick speaks the hero’s language, assists him in his work, and in general does his bidding,” as Brantlinger states before suggesting how several examples work similarly to Captain Marryat’s use of the trope in his novels: “Mesty is to *Midshipman Jack Easy* as Friday is to *Robinson Crusoe*, Chingachgook to *Natty Bumpoo*, and Umslopagaas to *Allan Quartermain*: the noble savage in partnership with the conquering hero. In each case the white hero shares some of the qualities of the savage sidekick, but the doubling or mirroring process is lopsided: white always overshadows black” (58). Dain Waris looks very much like Marryat’s Mesty in *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, “once an Ashanti ‘prince’,” in that he “demonstrates his courage and resourcefulness on numerous occasions, often rescuing Jack from scrapes” and in that “equality is not the message of Jack and Mesty’s bond, but power and the highly unequal though respectful sharing” (58). But this is not an isolated coincidence, since “Mesty’s life as a warrior prince follows the noble savage pattern of Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688) and of numerous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abolitionist tracts” (Brantlinger 59). Dain Waris’ essential nobility is demonstrated by the fact that he accepts Jim’s inheritance of his father’s power as ruler of Patusan, even helping him to achieve this in the battle against Sherif Ali.

Thus, the singling out of Dain Waris depicts a common stereotype within the general one of the noble savage. “Living in the shadow of Jim’s glorious reputation he is an active participant in the myth making but, like the stereotypical noble native of romance, he is subordinate to the white man” (Dryden 172) and in the rather more ambiguous case of Jim, he helps to assert his righteousness, which benefits Marlow’s misleading storytelling. Nevertheless, Dain Waris’ narrative function in relation to the people from which he stands out is ultimately degrading, for it highlights their lack of all his exceptional qualities. Marlow’s process of description of the scarcely present population of Patusan through negative images shows the essential aspect of the metaphoric working of racial stereotypes as described by

Bhabha. Again, the narrative of what refers to or is bound to Europeans is explicit and positive, material discourse, while that which refers to the colonized space flits through the narrative like a shadow, in the hollow and indefinite form of an echo. If Dain Waris' presence by Jim's side is mostly tacit in the narrative, since most of the time he is not mentioned, his silence is real in the sense that, surprisingly enough, he is not allowed to speak.

The last relevant Malay character with a name is Tamb' Itam, Jim's servant. This character matches the stereotype of the loyal servant, so long codified in literature in such emblematic literary characters as Friday in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and the misleading Babo in Melville's *Benito Cereno*. His essential role in the story is to accompany and watch Jim at every single moment. His presence as an actor is left until the end of the story when he is in charge of informing Dain Waris that Brown and his people are leaving Patusan, and later, when he kills Cornelius and finds himself in the position of being the first to communicate the news of Dain Waris' death to Jim. He also makes Jim aware of the Patusani's rage. Whereas his actions in the story do not provide any signs of alteration in the stereotype, Marlow's first description of him is rather disturbing:

This was a Malay from the north, a stranger who had wandered into Patusan, and had been forcibly detained by Rajah Allang as paddler of one of the state boats. He had made a bolt of it at the first opportunity, and finding a precarious refuge (but very little to eat) amongst the Bugis settlers, had attached himself to Jim's person. His complexion was very dark, his face flat, his eyes prominent and injected with bile. There was something excessive, almost fanatical, in his devotion to his 'white lord'. He was inseparable from Jim like a morose shadow. On state occasions he would tread on his master's heels, one hand on the haft of his kriss, keeping the common people at a distance by his truculent brooding glances. Jim had made him the headman of his establishment, and all Patusan respected and courted him as a person of much influence. At the taking of the stockade he had distinguished himself greatly by the methodical ferocity of his fighting. (162)

Knowing how the Bugis had admitted Jim "into the heart of the community," Tamb' Itam's suspicious, violent and menacing attitude should elicit some doubts about Jim's choice of this man as his personal servant. If his actions conform to the stereotype of the noble servant, this image somehow brakes with it in the sense in which

Melville's Babo appears disturbing at certain points in the narrative from Delano's perspective. 'Tamb' Itam might work as a sign of Jim's misleading image that is shadowed by Marlow's heroic construction of Jim, intensely worked in this second part of the novel through his ironic rewriting of an adventure novel. It is precisely in the narrative contrast of this secondary character with the stereotypes of the Bugis in general as noble savages, amongst which 'Tamb' Itam has found refuge, that we find some discordant sign to which our attention is drawn, which constitutes one of 'Tamb' Itam's narrative functions.

Marlow's further snapshots of this character serve to restore the reader's confidence in the loyal servant stereotype. Though 'Tamb' Itam remains an obscure character, when Marlow has to decide which version of Jim's story he would embrace in his last moments in Patusan, he rejects Jewel's and assumes 'Tamb' Itam's. He argues

Henceforth events move fast without a check, flowing from the very hearts of men like a stream from a dark source, and we see Jim amongst them, mostly through 'Tamb' Itam's eyes. The girl's eyes had watched him too, but her life is too much entwined with his: there is her passion, her wonder, her anger, and, above all, her fear and her unforgiving love. Of the faithful servant, uncomprehending as the rest of them, it is the fidelity alone that comes into play; a fidelity and a belief in his lord so strong that even amazement is subdued to a sort of saddened acceptance of a mysterious failure. He has eyes only for one figure, and through all the mazes of bewilderment he preserves his air of guardianship, of obedience, of care. (231)

It is extremely significant that Marlow rejects not only the emotional states of anger, passion, and unforgiving love but also of wonder. Rather, he prefers to endorse the point of view of a faithful servant who does not comprehend but shows a fanatical love for and faith in Jim. Marlow gives authority to 'Tamb' Itam's storytelling because he is sympathetic to his faithfulness and his "saddened acceptance of a mysterious failure." 'Tamb' Itam's eyes eliminate doubt from the narrative until the very end, when Marlow dares to wonder again about Jim's final, confusing intentions. Indeed as Marlow's narrative progresses it seems to converge toward a voice that "has eyes only for one figure, and through all the mazes of bewilderment he preserves his air of guardianship, of obedience, of care." That is why, in part, Marlow's narrative is entitled *Lord Jim*. Thus, 'Tamb' Itam's narrative

functions as the source of an adequate tone in which the end of Jim's story will be written.

In general, the Malay population appears as a crowd accompanying the main Malay characters such as Doramin, Dain Waris or Jewel, or surrounding Jim. They are referred to as they praise their leaders, beset by childish worries (such as small daily fights) or grappling with their major concerns such as oppression and the future of their country; but they are frequently mentioned in relation to their ignorance, which fosters their credulity, as we have seen. They are far, however, from those savage Africans whose stereotype is commonly transferred to other populations in the imperial literature of the last two decades of the century, which resulted from the internal crisis and decline in self-confidence of the British imperialists.<sup>220</sup>

The noble savage stereotype of the Malay in Patusan, above all for the Bugis, works to strengthen the stereotype of the gentleman colonizer in his divine essence, apparent honesty and intelligence; likewise, that of the menacing degenerate helps to build up the hero's courage, providing a reason to defeat a part of the local population and impose himself as a ruler. In this process of "civilizing" Patusan, the issue of religion, which is an essential ingredient of the colonial discourse and the stereotype of the gentleman itself, is raised by the presence of Islam among the Malay. Though Jim is not told to Christianize Patusan, the presence of someone with his religious background activates the opposition that usually shapes the imperial quest, tracing continuity with the pilgrims.<sup>221</sup>

This complex articulation of the stereotype of the Other, therefore, by playing with presence/absence and allowing the reader to restore in the mind's eye the negative images of the positive ones present in the narrative, greatly contributes to Marlow's redrawing and emphasizing

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<sup>220</sup> See the depiction of blacks, mainly in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, in Michael Echeruo, "Conrad's Nigger." *Joseph Conrad: Third World Perspectives* 131-143.

<sup>221</sup> Adams goes further in interpreting this. For him, "Subtly but unmistakably, Conrad uses Patusan to transform the struggle within Jim's imagination into a conflict with Islam. Thus the second half of the novel strengthens the repression and displacement only half accomplished in the *Patna* episode. Conrad emphasizes Jim's sense of solidarity with the Muslim pilgrims while on the ship and even in the act of leaping, but when such solidarity becomes too oppressive then Islam becomes the enemy." (*Colonial Odysseys* 139.)

of clear racial lines, upon which his aim of exonerating Jim ultimately relies.

### 3. 6. The half-castes' threat, passage, tragedy

The figure of the “half-caste,” like that of mulatto in particular, might be one of the best-codified stereotypes in racial discourse, especially in literature. From the white perspective, “half-caste” refers to an individual one of whose parents is white. By extension, in colonial literature it refers to people born into families with white ancestors as well as those of “other races.” Societies that have historically comprised an increasing number of what were contemptuously referred to as “half-castes,” the most obvious cases being the Southern United States, South Africa, the Caribbean and Brazil, simultaneously engendered the stereotype of the half-caste as a menace as well as an intermediary and a victimized tragic figure. The stereotype is so intrinsically ambivalent that it has not only engendered polyvalent characters, but also offered a narrative strategy to present the intricate complexity of racial issues. To present the stereotype in its most basic form, H. L. Malchow’s exploration of the Gothic in nineteenth-century Britain is useful. The critic asserts that, on the one hand, “[b]oth vampire and half-breed are creatures who transgress boundaries and are caught between two worlds. Both are hidden threats—disguised presences bringing pollution of the blood. Both may be able to ‘pass’ among the unsuspecting, although both bear hidden signs of their difference which the wary may read.” On the other hand, though, “the half-breed could be viewed sympathetically, not as a racial danger to whites, but as a superior class of Negro, touched by the saving grace of white blood; or, alternatively, as an object of sympathy, a ‘victim of class and colour,’ unfairly rejected, martyred, by both worlds. Either way the half-breed was here the true inheritor of the image of the ex-slave crafted by the evangelical abolitionist. An eternal victim raised from the bestial, not merely by evangelical exhortation, by the blood of the lamb, but by the actual blood of the white paternalist.”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> H. L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in the Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996, 168 and 173.

The half-caste's identity problem is not belonging to the white race nor being entirely part of what was delimited as the Other. Even though biologically the half-caste individual contains some "white blood"—whether that is acknowledged by white society or not—his "not quite" whiteness makes his or her classification in racial terms uncertain. In the South of the United States, this phenomenon resulted in the invention of the "one-drop" rule, which gained popular support and drove mulattos to the other side of the color line. Half-castes do not generally benefit from white privileges; neither do they consider themselves fully accepted as equals in the "Other" communities. Concerns about identity often shape literary characters in both black and white literature.

But there is another form of the stereotype fully developed primarily in white literature that reflects the anguish of the whites: the threatening half-caste. As they are the result of miscegenation, half-castes were threatening the essential and codified hierarchy of "human races" extensively elaborated during the second half of the nineteenth century. Not only were they a threat to racial distinction in the future, but they represented living proof that existing racial lines were false. A half-caste could have a sufficiently pale complexion and be educated in white manners that he or she could effect what was known as "passing." These individuals are "look white" within white society, they can "bleach out," as Shreve would say in *Absalom, Absalom!* Were racial lines to be acknowledged as false, both races would be able to claim equal rights. We will study the mulatto stereotype extensively when analyzing Faulkner's novel.

In the colonial space as viewed from the distant metropolis things are different. The half-caste does not perform such a terrifying role as the mulatto does in the Southern States or in South Africa. As Malchow notes, "in the colonial empire, he had long been an object of condescension, when loyal and useful, and of fear and hatred when rebellious" (199). Half-castes do however retain the inner problem of being marginalized from the population belonging to the "native world" at the same time that they are excluded from white circles. In places where the colonial power is not threatened by its subordinates, half-castes are treated more benevolently, normally used to establish a bridge between the white world and the "darkest," "wild" territories. Whites use half-castes to obtain information and to benefit from their knowledge of both worlds. But this knowledge and the half-castes'

‘superior’ qualities in contrast to individuals of the Other race, prove to be no less a threat to their overlords’ civilizing and racial discourse.

Two important characters in *Lord Jim’s* Patusan are half-castes: Cornelius and Jewel. Besides, there is another double figure of a half-caste that fits the stereotype in every respect. This much less complex figure only appears to perform the role of a transition between the two worlds, the White realm and the Other’s realm, that of Life and that of Death. In his telling of his and Jim’s trip to Patusan, Marlow describes the brigantine’s master as “a dapper little half-caste of forty or so, in a blue flannel suit, with lively eyes, his round face the colour of lemon-peel, and with a thin little black moustache dropping on each side of his thick, dark lips . . . He turned out, notwithstanding his self-satisfied and cherry exterior, to be of a careworn temperament. He was going to carry the gentleman to the mouth of the river, but would ‘never ascend’” (144). Marlow is annoyed by this haughty master’s self-importance stemming from his job and his knowledge of the area, and by the fact that “he scowled and beamed at me, and watched with satisfaction the undeniable effect of his phraseology” (144). Marlow’s dislike of this person floods his narrative in the form of malicious ridicule of the subject. He initially resorts to a commonplace in imperial literature: he scorns the brigantine master’s English, never allowing any room for reflection about language as something imposed or other than his own: “His flowing English seemed to be derived from a dictionary compiled by a lunatic.” And several times afterwards he sarcastically points out his improper use of language: “Had Mr. Stein desired him to ‘ascend’, he would have ‘reverentially’—(I think he wanted to say respectfully—but devil only knows) ‘reverentially made objects for the safety of properties,’ or ‘comparing the place to a ‘cage of beast made ravenous by long impertinence’. I fancy he meant impunity” (144). Marlow’s mocking does not stop here. He repeatedly remarks upon “the pride of his fluency,” and “the insufferably conceited air of his kind after what they imagine a display of cleverness” (145). Against this “bursting with importance,” Marlow says that “behind him I perceived Jim smiling silently at me, and with a raised hand checking the exclamation on my lips” (145).<sup>223</sup> The extent to which this scene imposes the imperialist

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<sup>223</sup> Robert F. Lee’s knowledge of South-East Asia is reflected in his explanation that the English of this half-caste was known as *chi chi* English. He comments: “Why the crossbreed’s English, called *chi chi* (pronounced chee chee), has such a distinctive cast it is hard to say. Its sing-song quality, which is more humorous than lyrical, may

vision of the prototypical white, educated colonizers over the native population by making it clear to the latter that their efforts to mimic the colonizers are not only worthless but also ridiculous, needs no further emphasis.<sup>224</sup> If this character becomes the object of self-affirmation at the gates of the uncivilized inland territory of Patusan, he also performs the other common function of the transition from the world of the civilized to that of the wilderness. As Sooyoung Chon observes about this Caronte-like figure,

in the half-caste shipmaster of Stein's brigantine that takes Jim to Patusan, hybridity manifests itself in the form of flighty insecurity. Self-importance, childish vanity, exaggerated volubility and fierceness, and his lunatic vocabulary reveal the disharmonious combination of the two worlds that meet in him. It is significant that he acts as a physical conveyor of Jim into the native world, acting as a link between the white world and the native world.<sup>225</sup>

Apart from this character, we are rendered what seems to be an even worse half-caste who not only boasts of his knowledge of both worlds but who embodies the ugliness and moral corruption associated with the privileged state of hybridity. On his way to Patusan, Marlow tells that there was a town that

boasted of a third-class deputy–assistant resident, a big, fat greasy, blinking fellow of mixed descent, with turned out, shiny lips. I found him lying extended on his back in a cane chair, odiously unbuttoned, with a large green leaf of some sort on the top of his steaming head, and another in hand which he used lazily as a fan. . . . (166)

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result from the influence of the quantitative meter of Oriental languages. Its intensity, which borders on hysterics, may be a pathetic mirroring of an internal franticness of the unidentified individual's trying to assume a sense of belonging in a tight caste society. This attempted assertion may also be the cause of the ridiculous 'refinement' of vocabulary and the high pitch of delivery. Conrad's obviously fine ear has enabled him to give an astonishingly accurate representation of *chi chi* English." (125). Lee also notes how uncommon English involvement in intermixing is in Conrad's fiction (121).

<sup>224</sup> On the mockery of the non-English speakers' use of language, see especially Conrad's short story "Amy Foster" and its analysis by Nico Israel in "Exile, Conrad, and 'La Difference Essentielle des Races'." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 30.3 (Spring 1997): 361-80.

<sup>225</sup> Sooyoung Chon, "Tactics for Mediating Bifurcated Worlds: Doubling, Border-Crossing, and Hybridity." *L'Époque Conradienne* 24 (1998): 20.

Marlow describes the deputy's gestures accompanying his words, as when "he shut one of this beastly glassy eyes (the eyelid went on quivering) while he leered at me atrociously with the other" or staring at him "steadfastly with both his eyes open" which makes Marlow wonder "whether he was mad or drunk." His last impression of him when "[h]e perspired, puffed, moaning feebly, and scratching himself with such horrible composure that I could not bear the sight long enough to find out" (167), utters a repulsive image.

This parallel figure also located near the mouth of the Patusan River injects movement into the stereotype of the half-caste that evolves through these two mirror figures towards a less positive function of passage. Transitions between, and belonging to both communities as accomplished narratively by this last half-caste character provide an image of a group that

obviously profits from illegal commissions, bribery, and exploitation, acting as a link between the native world and the white world. His monstrous form symbolizes the corruptive possibilities of the colonial encounter. His preposterous proposal enlightens Jim concerning the legendary story spread among the natives about the priceless emerald that is concealed upon the bosom of a girl who is 'insensible to the seduction of love.' (Chou 21)

Therefore, their function of passage is tainted by the greater scope for corruption resulting from knowledge of both worlds at the end of the narrative. This, as we will see, strengthens the narrative function of Cornelius in Patusan.

Cornelius and Jewel, his stepdaughter whose white father had left, live with her mother in Stein's house separated from the Bugis by the river. In his opposition to Jim's replacement of him as Stein's deputy in Patusan, Cornelius not only reveals himself as an abject person who keeps an eye on Jim constantly searching for a way to kill him, but his malice is reinforced by Marlow's and Jim's descriptions of him. This pattern of description, which resembles the previously analyzed one of the third-class deputy-assistant, is consistent with the stereotype of the half-caste as a threat, even a mortal danger, but also that of degeneration, which pseudoscientific racial theories argued to be the biological result of miscegenation. Cornelius is an "awful little Malacca Portuguese" who

Was creeping across in full view with an inexpressible effect of stealthiness, of dark and secret slinking. He reminded one of everything that is unsavoury. His slow laborious walk resembled the creeping of a repulsive beetle, the legs alone moving with horrid industry while the body glided evenly. I suppose he made straight enough for the place where he wanted to get to, but his progress with one shoulder carried forward seemed oblique. He was often circling slowly amongst the sheds, as if following a scent; passing before the verandah with upward stealthy glances; disappearing without haste round the corner of some hut. That he seemed free of the place demonstrated Jim's absurd carelessness or else his infinite disdain, for Cornelius had played a very dubious part (to say the least of it) in a certain episode which might have ended fatally for Jim. (170)

Following this description of his generally disquieting movements, Marlow makes sure his audience understands the nature of this character:

That was his characteristic; he was fundamentally and outwardly abject, as other men are markedly of a generous, distinguished, or venerable appearance. It was the element of his nature which permeated all his acts and passions and emotions; he raged abjectly, smiled abjectly, was abjectly sad; his civilities and his indignations were alike abject. I am sure his love would have been the most abject of sentiments—but can one imagine a loathsome insect in love? And his loathsomeness too was abject, so that a simply disgusting person would have appeared noble by his side. He has his place neither in the background nor in the foreground of the story; he is simply seen skulking on its outskirts, enigmatical and unclean, tainting the fragrance of its youth and its naïveness. (171)

This will be reinforced again by “the sight of his abject grimacing [which] was very hard to bear: he clutched at his hair, beat his breast, rocked himself to and fro with his hands pressed to his stomach, and actually pretended to shed tears,” kinesics that remind us of the half-caste near the Patusan river.

Cornelius had resolved to “steal, embezzle, and appropriate to himself for many years and in any way that suited him best, the goods of Stein's Trading Co.” He also mistreated his stepdaughter who receives Jim's sympathy for being “at the mercy of that ‘mean, cowardly scoundrel’” (172).

His words to Jewel—“Your mother was a devil, a deceitful devil—and you are a devil” (172)—and his warnings to Jim that “Your blood be on your own head” (173) and “You shall d-d-die h-h-here” (174), evince his narrative function as Jim’s principal threat, along with Rajah Allang. In spite of Marlow’s words that “the man was too insignificant to be dangerous, though he was as full of hate as he could hold” (193), Cornelius’ function extends beyond a potential threat when he becomes an accomplice to murder, convincing Brown to kill Dain Waris—an act that induces Jim to think that the only solution is to offer his life to Doramin. Cornelius appears in the novel principally in his several attempts to persuade other whites to act against Jim (Marlow in Chapter XXXIV and Brown in Chapters XXXIX-XLIV), in the course of which he is never shown to be capable of a positive action.

However as exaggerated and grotesque as he is, Cornelius threatens not only Jim’s life but also his fame and his public image. Cornelius insists on Jim’s childishness, foolishness, and capacity to persuade and delude people. Thus he asks Marlow the question “Who is he? What does he want here—the big thief?” and tells him “He throws dust into everybody’s eyes; he throws dust into your eyes, honourable sir; but he can’t throw dust into my eyes. He is a big fool. . . . He’s no more than a little child—a little child—a little child” (194). He tells similarly about Jim to Gentleman Brown. Attentive readers will not miss how his words recall Marlow’s own hesitation here and focus on these same suspicious, betraying qualities of a colonizer who just appears to adapt to the standards of conduct of gentlemanly heroes. In this sense Cornelius threatens, more importantly, Marlow’s exonerating telling of Jim’s story to the outside world; on the other hand, his grotesque depiction works as an effective narrative strategy to undermine his opinions about Jim.

Apart from his main function as a threat, Cornelius as the figure of the wretched half-caste performs the role of a negative force from whose clutches Jim can “save” Jewel, and attain her love and “native” companionship, thereby reinforcing the hero’s quest and strengthening the bonds with the adventure novel Marlow is telling. In a complementary function, Cornelius shares with the half-caste shipmaster the role of intermediary between the “native” and the “white” worlds—in this case with betrayal as the wages of hybridity. Cornelius is in charge of delivering Jim’s note informing Brown that

they can leave because “he could speak English, was known to Brown and was not likely to be shot by some nervous mistake of one of the men as a Malay” (235).

Marlow’s shading of Jim in his narrative is so severely controlled that disturbing and alien questioning of Jim’s image is either distorted or silenced. Indeed, Cornelius’ abject figure is contrasted to that of his stepdaughter Jewel at the same time that it shares the function in the novel of a threat to Jim’s story in its retelling.

Commonly portrayed as the beautiful exotic woman, Jewel is also a half-caste who follows in her mother’s footsteps by sharing her life with a white man, who will eventually leave her. Her condition as a half-caste legitimizes Jim’s falling in love with her and her role as his confident, wise companion who “did give him a lot of useful hints as to Patusan affairs” (174). She is given much authority (when Jim is away she rules in his stead, and is in charge of the fort where all the arms are stored) to the point that she is sometimes described as boyish and along with Jim as “a self-communion of one being carried on in two tones” (169). She is by his side at all times, watching him. Her three-quarters of whiteness allow her to perform that role closely associated with whites, and seems to give her not only the right to education but great intelligence, since she predicts her future and seems to understand Jim’s duplicity—though she is not aware of the precise deeds that are the root of his melancholy, which would resolve the enigma. Despite her olive skin color, for the most part her personal qualities match those of whiteness, since she has mostly white ancestors, and thus is “nearly white.” As Muriel Moutet synthesizes,

On retrouve là une stratégie habituelle du discours colonial qui consiste à amalgamer la femme métisse au monde blanc : cette femme est généralement moins dévaluée que l’homme métisse car pas elle ne représente pas une menace directe contre la domination blanche. En outre, elle est sexuellement valorisée. En effet, pour que, par son union avec elle, Jim ne puisse être soupçonné de « going native » et reste également aussi immaculé que possible (depuis le casque colonial jusqu’à la pointe des souliers passés au blanc, sa différence est rendue visible par le texte), il est nécessaire qu’elle soit métisse, autrement dit

que le sang indigène soit en elle « dilué » depuis deux générations (je demande pardon au lecteur de cet atroce vocabulaire).<sup>226</sup>

Even though this is very neatly drawn in the narrative by her actions and words, Marlow categorically rejects Jewel's perspective. Yet this is not so apparent.

Marlow introduces Jewel as “a melancholy figure of a woman, the shadow of a cruel wisdom buried in a lonely grave, looking on wistfully, helplessly, with sealed lips” (165). Her first appearance in the narrative is very pleasant and joyful, since we first meet her as a “white form within the house, a faint exclamation, and a child-like but energetic little face with delicate features and a profound attentive glance [that] peeped out of the inner gloom, like a bird out of the recess of a nest” (166).

A long, delicate description of her will be the starting point of her unfolding towards an avoidable anxious presence. Marlow draws her from memory:

What I remember best is the even, olive pallor of her complexion, and the intense blue-black gleams of her hair, flowing abundantly from under a small crimson cap she wore far back on her shapely head. Her movements were free, assured, and she blushed a dusky red. While Jim and I were talking, she would come and go with rapid glances at us, leaving on her passage an impression of grace and charm and a distinct suggestion of watchfulness. Her manner presented a curious combination of shyness and audacity. Every pretty smile was succeeded swiftly by a look of silent, repressed anxiety, as if put to flight by the recollection of some abiding danger. At times she would sit down with us and, with her soft cheek dimpled by the knuckles of her little hand, she would listen to our talk; her big clear eyes would remain fastened on our lips, as though each pronounced word had a visible shape. Her mother had taught her to read and write; she had learned a good bit of English from Jim, and she spoke it most amusingly, with his own clipping, boyish intonation. Her tenderness hovered over him like a flutter of wings. (169)

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<sup>226</sup> Muriel Moutet, “Le Patusan de *Lord Jim*, ou des liens ma tissés.” *L'Époque Conradianne* 28 (2002); 143. Moutet interprets Jewel's failure as the novel's rejection of miscegenation.

Her charming appearance will be overshadowed by her obsessive alertness and her anxiety rooted in the fear of abandonment. In reference to this, Marlow observes that “[h]e was jealously loved, but why she should be jealous, and of what, I could not tell. The land, the people, the forests were her accomplices, guarding him with vigilant accord, with an air of seclusion, of mystery, of invincible possession” (169).

Jewel participates in the episode of Cornelius’ plan that results in Jim’s murder of a native, and the forced drowning of two more; in her conversation with Marlow; and the Gentleman Brown episode—apart from those glimpses in the middle and at the conclusion of the novel, at Stein’s house, when Jim is already dead.

While the passages that deal with the adventurous plot of the narrative inform us about her strength, her loyalty and her watchfulness, her conversations with Marlow cast her as a “spectre of fear” (192). Her Janus-like character is made effective by Conrad’s representation of femininity. As Lisa Schneider claims, Jewel’s representation recalls the figure of Delacroix’s Marianne in *Liberty Guiding the People* (1831), who was “portrayed as the dynamic ‘best man’ of the French revolution, her femininity predictably nullified by her inspirational function for male insurgents; however, she also became the inadvertent standard adopted by many French women, who saw her as representative of liberty and equality for all persons, men and women alike.”<sup>227</sup> In a striking correlation to the representation of race, Jewel’s simultaneous embodying of the racial and gender categories reinforces the double portrayal of a blinded, defenseless woman and the menace of her exposure of the regimes of domination, since “men’s desire to find redemption in women is countered by the exposure of the ‘lie’ in which their idealism is grounded” (Schneider 32). Attention to Jewel’s relationship to Marlow and his portrait of her shall illuminate this point.

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<sup>227</sup> Lissa Schneider, *Conrad’s Narratives of Difference: Not Exactly Tales for Boys*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003, 21. On Conrad and gender issues, see Jeremy Hawthorn, *Sexuality and the Erotic in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad*. London: Continuum, 2007; and Andrew Michael Roberts, ed., *The Conradian: Conrad and Gender*. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993.

Jewel waits for Marlow to interrogate him on a night that shadows her bright figure into that of a ghost, in a metaphor of Marlow's evolving perspective of her:

It was dark under the projecting roof, and all I could see were the flowing lines of her gown, the pale small oval of her face, with the white flash of her teeth, and, turned towards me, the big sombre orbits of her eyes, where there seemed to be a faint stir, such as you may fancy you can detect when you plunge your gaze to the bottom of an immensely deep well. What is that moves there? you ask yourself. Is it a blind monster or only a lost gleam from the universe? (183)

Her "ghostly figure" swaying "like a slender tree in the wind" and the unfathomable darkness of her eyes close the passage (183). The conversation is described before being rendered, and Marlow's reflections intend to condition our future interpretation of it. Marlow's misleading stereotypical judgment, which even seeks the complicity of his audience, should be seriously considered in this commentary:

It occurred to me—don't laugh—that all things being dissimilar, she was more inscrutable in her childish ignorance than the Sphinx propounding childish riddles to wayfarers. She had been carried off to Patusan before her eyes were open. She had grown up there; she had seen nothing, she had known nothing, she had no conception of anything. I ask myself whether she were sure that anything else existed. What notions she may have formed of the outside world is to me inconceivable: all that she knew of its inhabitants were a betrayed woman and a sinister pantaloon. (183)

Marlow even suggests that she was possessed by a "real and intolerable anguish that might have conceivably been driven her into plotting my murder, had the fierceness of her soul been equal to the tremendous situation it had created" (183). Yet as inoffensive as Marlow knows Jewel to be, his distant white male perspective can preserve the stereotypical seductive and pitiable image of the faithful exotic woman to which Marlow will return, after overcoming his great disdain: "I was immensely touched: her youth, her ignorance, her pretty beauty, which had the simple charm and the delicate vigour of a wild-flower, her pathetic pleading, her helplessness, appealed to me with almost the strength of her own unreasonable and natural fear" (184).

Jewel's version of the story, which would have voiced her conviction that "they always leave us" (184) and her accusations leveled against Jim and Marlow that "you are mad or false" (244), or "You are false!" thrown at Jim alone (245), will be erased from the narrative by the end. Her feelings towards white men put pressure on Marlow when she asks him angrily at Stein's house: "you always leave us—for your own ends. . . . Ah! you are hard, treacherous, without truth, without compassion. What makes you so wicked? Or is it that you are all mad?" (206).<sup>228</sup>

Her berating and Marlow's feeling that "though by nothing but his [Jim's] presence he had mastered her heart, had filled all her thoughts, and had possessed himself of all her affections, she underestimated his chances of success" (184), along with her daring to doubt his word (187) in contrast to the rest of his subordinates in Patusan, makes Jewel a threatening presence in Marlow's narrative not far removed from Cornelius, and in a sense even more dangerous because, although stereotyped, she is not portrayed scornfully and she benefits from the superior intelligence entailed by the benevolent half-caste stereotype. Her authority in the narrative, though denied by Marlow, is reinforced by the fact that Jewel voices Marlow's fears to the extent that when she is telling him the reason for her fear Marlow feels that

For a moment, I had a view of a world that seemed to wear a vast and dismal aspect of disorder, while, in truth, thanks to our unwearied efforts, it is as sunny an arrangement of small conveniences as the mind of man can conceive. But still—it was only a moment: I went back into my shell directly. (186)

The first part of the novel has been elaborated upon the very doubt and the enigma that Jewel clearly understands. But Marlow's incapacity to grasp it, and his fear of a figure of Jim that would appear to the world not only "under a cloud" but as either mad or false, frightens him, as it had frightened Captain Brierly. Marlow's retreat back into his shell is narratively performed by his rejection of Jewel's storytelling at Stein's, of which the reader is deprived, mirroring the effect of the

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<sup>228</sup> In his psychoanalytical study, which relies primarily on Freud's concept of the fetish, Simpson analyses the role of women in Conrad's fiction: "it is worth noticing that there are elsewhere strong suggestions that the configured structure of imaginative commerce may be nothing more than a mystification of white masculine energies and desires. It is the women who deliver the strongest denunciations of the demands of trade and profit." (*Fetishism* 99)

omission of Jim's jump. About his listening, Marlow says only that "I did hear. I heard it all, listening with amazement, with awe, to the tones of her inflexible weariness. She could not grasp the real sense of what she was telling me, and her resentment filled me with pity of her—for him too" (207).

When the moment arrives for Marlow to call on the very last witness of Jim's demise, he refuses Jewel's testimony because "the girl's eyes had watched him too, but her life is too much entwined with his: there is her passion, her wonder, her anger, and, above all, her fear and her unforgiving love," and endorses instead Tamb' Itam's faithful narrative (231).

Jewel's narrative function can be envisioned as a fulfillment of the stereotype of the half-caste, who threatens the apparent stability of Western colonial discourse. Being a female and defenceless she only has the power of her words at her disposal, which she uses to lament her doomed fate and to focus blame on Jim as a white colonizer. But after the fashion of most imperial literature, in which genre Marlow tries to fit her, the colonized have no voice, their counter-narratives are censored. Of course, Marlow reproduces Jewel's words and actions in a way that she can stand by herself, but his judgmental commentaries accommodate her figure to the stereotypes of the "exotic" woman and the "half-caste." More importantly, he expurgates her discourse and disavows her doubts—which happen to be coincident to his own—for the sake of an image of Jim more controllably overshadowed and suspiciously close to that of the adventure novel hero, a parody which has the ambiguous and paradoxical effect of simultaneously endorsing the genre it counters.

By way of conclusion, I think it can be stated that when drawn as characters half-castes in *Lord Jim* perform the common narrative function of setting a path of transition between the world of the "natives" and that of the colonizer; the function of the embodiment of the degeneration of the species in the figures of Cornelius and the third-class deputy-assistant; and, finally, the function of menacing the established order of racial hierarchy and attendant privileges. This last function is the most relevant. It is embodied by Cornelius, who presents a threat to Jim's life. Although Marlow does not foresee it, Cornelius' threat is the only successful one, for he manages to get rid of Jim, even at the price of his own life. More importantly, Cornelius

and Jewel's threats also affect the telling of the story, that is, the image Marlow is projecting to the world.

However, Conrad's turning of the screw in the working of the stereotype of the half-caste is that its endorsement does not prevent the reader from seeing and hearing Jewel as different from the image of her presented, and to see the exploitative effect of fixed stereotypes on fictional characters exerted in the same way as they are by the racist imperial discourse. Marlow's prejudices here are so self-evident and his motives so transparent that, reinforced by the report of Jewel's words and actions, her character escapes her own depiction by the fact that Marlow's process of subjectivation, discussed by Bhabha, is so explicit here. Marlow's rejection of Jewel's telling works as the fetish of what he would like to have been daring enough to tell. His fears compel him to go back to his shell and, as a result, he ends up endorsing the convenient stereotype of the silenced "native" witness to the story's conclusion. Marlow's last, pitiful and silent image of Jewel remains as our last image of the novel, side-by-side with Stein, in a reminder of how both discourses, contradictory in their belief—or lack thereof—in Jim's truthfulness, help us understand that the mystery is definitely inscrutable.

### **3. 7. *Lord Jim*: inquiries and assumptions in dealing with the Adventure Novel and Travel Writing**

The second part of *Lord Jim* establishes an explicit dialogue with the adventure novel, ironically referred to by the frame narrator as "light literature" (9). Its narrative functioning in the novel needs to be understood in order to be able to suggest how racial stereotypes work in this particular section, and how this dialogue with the genre ultimately modifies the first part of the novel and its general interpretation, including racial representation.

The controversial examination of Conrad's position in relation to the popular genre of the adventure novel as a way of disentangling Conrad's personal attitude towards imperialist discourse is anything but straightforward. Nevertheless, Andrea White's prominent study on the subject, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition*, has significantly clarified the discussion by drawing nourishment from diverse material to reveal its complexity—including literary, historical and biographical

sources—and through her adoption of an intelligent and never fully categorical perspective, which intelligently highlights the problems of interpreting this necessary combination of data rather than aiming to provide solutions, in a suitably Conradian way.<sup>229</sup> The topic is so rich and *Lord Jim* so clearly understudied in relation to the genre that the sort of detailed analysis it merits is unfortunately beyond the scope of this section.

White's study shows that contemporaries did not view the "adventure novel" as escapist literature based on pure fantasy, but as pleasure reading that aimed to inform and teach as well as to amuse—in contrast to the domestic urban novel that, in depicting the Modern world, transmitted disgust and uneasiness to the British readership. In its ambition at the moment of its birth, the genre both claims and benefits from its resemblance to the narratives of travel writing, whose leading names such as Cook, Livingstone, and Stanley were the source of enthusiasm among their audience while gradually and profoundly yoking it to the purposes of a triumphal British imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century. As White explains:

In its construction of the imperial subject, then, adventure fiction derived its authority not only from its popular appeal but also from societal approval of its basic, and rather non-fictional, claims to be educational and inspirational, for the extent to which this discourse resembled the travel writing of the day, gave a special status to adventure fiction. So closely allied with travel writing, a genre that aspired to fact, after all, adventure fiction came to be viewed as a special case, demanding more credibility than other fictions. That both appeared not only in such an important publication as *Blackwoods'*—as we have seen—but also side by side in such popular periodicals as *The Graphic*, the *Illustrated London News*, *Cassell's*, *Cosmopolis*, *Conrhill*, *Fraser's*, *Longman's*, and *T.P.'s Weekly*, earned for both a special status, marking them as part of the factual, workday world of newsprint, not fanciful but part of the informational machinery of the day. (41)

As Stephen Donovan shows, the popular magazine culture provided grounds for the representation of the empire as well as it supplied several literary tropes that involved it and that were used and reused in literature in such a way that even Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* fitted perfectly next to not only fictional stories such as Cutcliffe Hyne's

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<sup>229</sup> Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and deconstructing the imperial subject*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

“The Transfer,” but travel writings as well.<sup>230</sup> Indeed, the cohabitating status of travel writing and the Adventure novel White underscores is relevant for understanding how Conrad’s fiction pertains to a context in which the fictional and the historical tend to merge, a combination that in turn explains how, working parallel to each other, many ideas that belong to imperial discourse are shaped and reinforced by fiction. This is obvious in the case of racial stereotypes, where a fictional assumption is dressed as truth. Yet fiction follows its own mandates and, as we have seen, however rigidly racial stereotypes are codified in imperial discourse, their use within a particular text does not only translate the stereotype into fiction but changes its constructive function to participate in a complex narrative structure such as *Lord Jim*. However, Conrad’s debt to the adventure novel as well as to travel writing is in fact much less paradoxical than it might seem to many critics, since the fact that his fiction contains genuinely historical material—much of it verified by Conrad’s own experience in the Malay Archipelago—inserts his work into the literature of the sea rather than departing from it. Conrad’s sources included several travel narratives, mainly those of James Brooke, the Rajah of Sarawak,<sup>231</sup> A. R. Wallace’s *The Malay Archipelago* (1869), and Major Frederick McNair’s *Perak and the Malays* (1878).<sup>232</sup> Even though Conrad claimed

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<sup>230</sup> Stephen Donovan, *Joseph Conrad and Popular Culture*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, 161-190. It is worth recalling here that, although I rely on my analysis of the *Lord Jim* published as a novel in 1900, this work had been previously published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* from October 1899 through November 1900. Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund have studied the effects and role of the Victorian Serial, and have included precisely *Lord Jim: A Sketch* in their chapter “Prefiguring an End to Progress” in their *The Victorian Serial*. Charlottesville and London: UP of Virginia, 1991.

<sup>231</sup> The parallels between Brooke’s narratives and *Lord Jim* are astonishing in regards to narrative form, which Hampson regrettably leaves unexplored: “Brooke’s account of Borneo and Celebes comes not in the form of a ‘history’ but as first-person narrative. Curiously, this narrative is not presented directly by Brooke: Brooke’s journal is mediated through two sea-captains, Keppel and Mundy. Henry Keppel’s *The Expedition to Borneo of H. M. S. Dido for the Suppression of Piracy* uses Keppel’s presence in the archipelago as captain of the *Dido* as the thinly-realised narrative frame for the inserted narrative of Brooke’s journal. Rodney Mundy’s *Narrative of Events in Borneo and Celebes* begins with a brief introduction in which Mundy sketches his association with Brooke; it then presents Brooke’s journals for 1838-1846, before turning, in Volume II, to Mundy’s own journal. In each of these volumes, Brooke’s narrative, like *Lord Jim*’s, is mediated through another’s narration.” (Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters* 66.)

<sup>232</sup> The most exhaustive investigation of Conrad’s historical sources in the Malay novels and tales, with a special emphasis on the story of James Brooke, the *Jeddah*

in a letter to William Blackwood that “I never did set up as an authority on Malaysia,” he defends himself by affirming that “the details picked up in the article were taken from ‘undoubted sources—dull wise books’,” in response to an accusation leveled by Hugh Clifford—another writer and a distinguished former colonial administrator in Malaya—denouncing Conrad’s “complete ignorance of Malays and their habits and customs” in *Almayer’s Folly*.<sup>233</sup> This exchange is interesting insofar as it reveals the slender line separating historical writing and imperial fiction.

In this sense, we find that the stereotypes shaped by particular historical events such as the Indian Mutiny, the American Civil War or the Governor Eyre Controversy, were absorbed by imperial discourse, reshaped in literature, and presented again to an audience that accepted them virtually as an embodiment of non-fictional characters. The inverse of this process applied to historical figures such as James Brooke, whose myth was constructed and given potency precisely by the *Illustrated London News*, the magazine where decades later Conrad published his short-stories “Amy Foster” and “The Lesson of the Collision,” as Donovan documents (172). In this way, historical and fictional figures meet in two genres that work in tandem to make them more historical and more abstract respectively. The blending of historical and fictional material in such proximate genres, furthermore, appears even more complex in the light of Agnes Yeow’s argument that “the Patusan sequence in *Lord Jim* (chapter 24 onwards) reveals the subtext of the *hikayat*,” which in Malay historiography is “a genre which melds history and fiction (in the form of legend and myth). The form lends itself to various genres such as memoir, travelogue, romantic adventure, and royal genealogy.”<sup>234</sup> In any case, the intertwining of the fictional and historical features begets

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episode, the Lingards, and Wallace and other travel writings, is still Norman Sherry’s impressive *Conrad’s Eastern World*. See also the well-documented and illuminating Agnes S. K. Yeow, *Conrad’s Eastern Vision: A Vain and Floating Appearance*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

<sup>233</sup> Quoted in Hampson (*Cross-cultural* 72). See also a review of Hugh Clifford and Joseph Conrad’s relationship in D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke’s *Developing Countries in British Fiction*. London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1977, 94. Goonetilleke attempts to evaluate Conrad’s degree of “authenticity” in his depiction of the Malay world by analyzing Conrad’s experience and “historical” readings, yet he believes Conrad’s representation of the Malays was in most cases a failure in light of his intentions.

<sup>234</sup> Agnes S. K. Yeow, *Conrad’s Eastern Vision: A Vain and Floating Appearance* 71 and 70.

a text that both introduces accurate historical perspectives as well as it absorbs a great part of the imagery of the imperial discourse—and, Yeow argues, the Malay “occult beliefs” on the “supernatural.”

This seems to apply to racial stereotypes as well. In providing historical documents that proved the authenticity of newly discovered, or already colonized countries’ geography, customs, political situation, and other ethnographic features, the fictions also compelled the readers to believe the description of their “native population.” Since the fortified village of Patusan actually existed (it was destroyed by Brooke) and its political situation has many historical elements—even though the country itself is an invention—the description of the Patusani seems to lay claim to a certain level of objectivity in relation to the extended area referred to by Conrad. This is not to say that Conrad thinks his Malaysia ought to be considered as real, but rather it is to affirm that he plays with the idea of confusing the boundaries between fiction and reality.

Seen from this point of view, racial stereotypes codified at certain historical moments that explain their essential multiplicity (what Bhabha labels ‘flexibility’) by the end of the nineteenth century had developed such an abstract fixed form that they appear in travel writing as well as in adventure fiction practically unchanged, and divorced from the particular historical context. It is not there that we may find a personal break with racial stereotypes in Conrad or Faulkner—no more than in the earlier case of Melville’s *Benito Cereno*—but rather in the narrative function they perform in the texts. Though different in their use and intentions, it seems reasonable to think that racial stereotypes were easily drawn from the racialised Victorian discourse into travel writing and the adventure novel, and finally non-generic literature such as Conrad’s work. Nonetheless, Conrad’s use of them is not a pure translation but a transformation that originates in his understanding of these stereotypes in their pure narrative function. This might be the reason for his response to Clifford’s critique, as well as his distancing from the adventure novel as a genre. In this sense, while the racial clichés that constitute the essence of the adventure novel, along with their misogynist counterparts, are clearly transposed into *Lord Jim*, it is their narrative function that is altered in the very specific ways we have seen.

In her description of the common ground between travel writing and the adventure novel, White observes that

In this discourse, both the travel writing and adventure fiction, one of the claims is that the hero/adventurer affects and even changes those he encounters, but remains stolidly unaffected by his experiences himself. In fact, in many ways he seems hardly to have left England but to have taken its amenities, attitudes, and moral orders along with him. The narration is always structured—in the three-fold manner of the quest romance—by the hero's setting out, for some ennobling cause, his adventures and encounters with the Other, and his successful return home. (23)

Thus the pattern of both genres involves the quest romance, the hero and the encounters with the Other that the hero manages to change in order to civilize the “native country,” which he achieves while remaining—unless he goes native—untouched by the uncivilized.

In *Lord Jim*'s Patuan Marlow narrates Jim's adventures in a telling that is packed with references to the register of the adventure novel. For example, Marlow insists on Jim's “heroic health” (147), his approach to “greatness” (147), that “nothing could touch him” (148), while Jim affirms his civilizing mission with the admission that “had I been wiped out it is this place that would have been the loser” (148). Jim's has to risk his life in several adventures that fit the heroic pattern, such as his escape from imprisonment by Rajah Allang, the killing of his would-be murderers, the destruction of Sherif Ali's hilltop kingdom, and many lesser exploits, such as when his canoe is capsized by an alligator on his way to Patuan and from which he emerges unharmed (147). The second part of the novel is full of heroic references that are too numerous to mention, but for which I direct the reader's attention to Dryden's section on *Lord Jim* in her *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, and to Robert Hampson's Chapter “The Brotherhood of the Sea: *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus,’ ‘Heart of Darkness’ and Lord Jim,*” or section IX of his *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity*.<sup>235</sup> They both

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<sup>235</sup> Dryden 137-194. Dryden suggests some of Conrad's alterations that we do not have space to discuss but I encourage the reader to do so in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the genre. Also, Robert Hampson, *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity* 129-132. For a general view of the trope or archetype of the “Quest” and, more specifically, the ‘Imperial Quest,’ see J. M. Rawa's interesting study *The Imperial Quest and Modern Memory from Conrad to Greene*. New York and London: Routledge, 2005.

consider how the Patusan section assumes the genre while at the same time introducing slight modifications—for example the fact that Jim cannot return home, or Conrad’s disdain for Jim’s bovarism in reading adventure fiction.<sup>236</sup> On this point, which will be analyzed further, the discussion remains open about whether Jim’s “suicide” should be regarded as a matter of imperial heroism or not.

While it is evident that the Patusan section in *Lord Jim* follows the pattern of the imperial romance, Marlow identifies it for the reader several times in a way that renders it more than a mere casual remark, one that almost adopts the tone of a warning. His most significant reference opens the second chapter in Patusan, chapter XXII, when Marlow says that “[t]he conquest of love, honour, men’s confidence—the pride of it, the power of it, are fit materials for a heroic tale; only our minds are stuck by the externals of such a success, and to Jim’s successes there were no externals. Thirty miles of forest shut it off from the sight of an indifferent world, and the noise of the white surf along the coast overpowered the voice of fame” (137). Marlow’s *captatio benevolentiae* is patent in the fact that Marlow has been telling Jim’s story repeatedly and he is going to leave part of it written, at least for the privileged man. So the lack of externals in Jim’s story is overcome, since Marlow has returned home to tell the tale, spreading his fame. By way of this pessimistic suggestion, Marlow turns the reader into a confidante of his own preoccupations, inviting him or her to think about Jim in heroic terms, in the same way that his audience reads heroic tales, adventure novels and travel writing.

Jim’s own readings shape his actions and his growing feeling that he has been granted the opportunity of his life in Patusan, a place where he finally sees himself “always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book” (9), as the frame narrator had warned the reader that Jim fancied himself. Jim believes that he has stumbled upon his heroic chance when he says of the token ring given to him by Stein for Doramin that “it’s like something you read of in books” (141), and when in his description of the Bugis he observes

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<sup>236</sup> White observes that in the genre of the adventure novel heroes learn the job and how to manage his seafaring and travelers’ experience through travel writing, so the genre rhetorically uses a technique of “internal self-endorsing,” privileging “the genre from within while arguing convincingly for its reliability” (48). This is one of the most obvious ways Conrad subverts the genre.

“triumphantly” that “they are like people in a book, aren’t they?” (156).

Marlow draws our attention to the several ingredients that shape the conventions of the genre, which invariably includes a “love story.” Thus, he guides his audience through his self-conscious construction of narrative yarns in order to channel their interpretation in the right direction when Jewel makes her appearance in the telling, a self-conscious telling that will be insisted upon while he tells how their relationship started (177). This is how Marlow introduces his articulation of the love story:

And this brings me to the story of his love.

I suppose you think it is a story that you can imagine for yourselves. We have heard so many such stories, and the majority of us don’t believe them to be stories of love at all. For the most part we look upon them as stories of opportunities: episodes of passion at best, or perhaps only of youth and temptation, doomed to forgetfulness in the end, even if they pass through the reality of tenderness and regret. This view mostly is right, and perhaps in this case too. Yet I don’t know. To tell this story is by no means so easy as it should be—were the ordinary standpoint adequate. (165)

Marlow recognizes that to follow the pattern of the genre is not easy in the case of Jim’s story because of certain disturbing elements. Nevertheless, his sophisticated telling skills will subtly overcome most of them, as we have already seen. Jim and Jewel’s love story has been interpreted as not following the pattern of a carefree, sexual relationship that seems to conform better to some stereotypes of the exotic woman in the colonies, and that are elaborated in *Heart of Darkness*; however, Jewel matches the stereotype of the half-caste woman and her relationship with Jim follows many Victorian conventions regarding matters of sexuality. Collits notes that

Victorian censorship played a significant role in sustaining the notion of Empire by representing ‘the code’ as something remote from sexuality. In promoting high ideals by enclosing them in pre-pubescent tales written for enthusiastic young men, it repressed the ‘problem’ of sexual desire for ‘native’ people by aestheticizing it as an adolescent romance. *Lord Jim* conforms to this standard by combining a truncated analysis of colonial desire with a sanitized version of male psychology. (127)

Throughout the course of this romantic relationship, Jim maintains his adherence to the gentleman's code of conduct in his restrained, "sanitized" and respectful attitude towards women, in clear opposition to the abhorrent image of those imperial heroes who "go native," and specifically in clear opposition to Kurtz.

Nevertheless, Marlow continues to interrogate the imperial romance in keeping with that double-edged tone inherent to the experience of the Exotic torn between mockery and sadness. We find what may be understood as a rejection of the imperial genre's propagandistic function in Marlow's description of the history of Patusan:

The seventeenth century traders went there for pepper, because the passion for pepper seemed to burn like a flame of love in the breast of Dutch and English adventurers about the time of James the First. Where wouldn't they go for pepper! For a bag of pepper they would cut each other's throats without hesitation, and would forswear their souls, of which they were so careful otherwise: the bizarre obstinacy of that desire made them defy death in a thousand shapes—the unknown seas, the loathsome and strange diseases; wounds, captivity, hunger, pestilence, and despair. It made them great! By heavens! It made them heroic; and it made them pathetic too in their craving for trade with the inflexible death levying its toll on young and old. It seems impossible to believe that mere greed could hold men to such a steadfastness of purpose, to such a blind persistence in endeavour and sacrifice. And indeed those who adventured their persons and lives risked all they had for a slender reward. They left their bones to lie bleaching on distant shores, so that wealth might flow to the living at home. To us, their less tried successors, they appear magnified, not as agents of trade but as instruments of a recorded destiny, pushing out into the unknown in obedience to an inward voice, to an impulse beating in the blood, to a dream of the future. They were wonderful; and it must be owned they were ready for the wonderful. They recorded it complacently in their sufferings, in the aspect of the seas, in the customs of strange nations, in the glory of splendid rulers. (137)

By locating the "greatness of exploitation" and the peak of heroism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Conrad allows Jim to stand out in his less greedy intentions; yet the audience is presented with a parody of the genre by this early forewarning.<sup>237</sup> In spite of Marlow's

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<sup>237</sup> This passage creates a further problem of interpretation of Conrad's stand towards imperialism. Critics such as Brantlinger and White agree that Conrad's main standpoint is mainly concerned with the existing gap between propaganda and the

highly critical narrative method, which nevertheless succumbs to the enchanter's wand, his telling will unexpectedly reproduce the mould of the narratives parodied. Subtle reminders such as Marlow's insistence upon tales of heroism will become scarce as the story develops. Marlow's last anticipation of Jim's story probably occurs at the beginning of chapter XXII, when he recognizes the only possible narrative form of "uncivilized spaces":

But do you notice how, three hundred miles beyond the end of telegraph cables and mail-boat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilisation wither and die, to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination, that have the futility, often the charm, and sometimes the deep hidden truthfulness, of works of art? Romance had singled Jim for its own—and that was the true part of the story, which otherwise was all wrong. (168)

If those who return to the lies of civilization produce misleading narratives, the tales of storytellers who remain outside possess the charm, and sometimes the truthful—yet futile—essence of works of art. Jim's breaking of the convention of returning home without going native—something that Marlow does—allows him to obviate the lies, even though everything else was 'wrong' with him. Furthermore, regarding the question of place in the story and attending to patterns of emigration in the British Empire at the end of the nineteenth century, Scott A. Cohen has noted how the Patusan imperialistic romance assumes a possible relocation of the forever dislocated Jim, at the same time that it "demonstrates that networks are easy to imagine from the imperial metropolis, but living in them is something altogether different."<sup>238</sup>

The clear exposure of Marlow's narrative method constitutes his main strategy of questioning this literature. He works the challenge out by assuring a distrustful audience of the story's subscription to the

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current exploitative nature of British imperialism, in contrast to an earlier period when more laudable motives were at the heart of imperial ventures, such as the journeys of exploration going back at least to the end of the eighteenth century. This quote seems to suggest a very pessimistic vision, yet its objective may be to participate in the process of empowering the figure of Jim. However, this passage certainly enriches the discussion about Conrad's relationship with imperialism.

<sup>238</sup> Scott A. Cohen, "Get Out!": Empire Migration and Human Traffic in *Lord Jim*." *Novel* 36:3 (Summer 2003): 393. In this insightful article, the contradictions at the heart of the imperial crisis and the imperialist propaganda appealing to the metropolitan population in relation to emigration are clear.

adventure novel, and by frequently referring to the evident coincidence of their motives. Racial stereotypes are inevitably a part of it, as much as the Exotic landscape, or what was known as “language-colour.”<sup>239</sup> This is why the stereotypes themselves and their functions within the Patusan section tend not to diverge from those formulated by the genre: the Malays, the pilgrims, the half-castes are relevant as long as they contribute to rebuilding Jim as the good-intended popular hero. Marlow’s telling of the facts instead of the underlying motivations to help construct the heroic character of Jim’s story, constitute the shift discussed in the previous chapter that conforms the section of Patusan to the imperial romance at the same time that it enacts the contrast between what have been labeled the two parts of the novel. It is precisely in this contrast that we find the parody.

Marlow’s intentions of fitting the mould in his telling are also parodied by other external factors in the story, establishing continuity in narrative method with the *Patna* section. In general, Jim’s words and actions continue to question the distance between his public image and his inner self, whereas Jewel functions as a discordant perspective of Jim as false and treacherous. Likewise, the unconvincing and ambiguous ending leaves the gloomy impression of a melancholic woman and at the same time that reveals Jim’s apparent good intentions that persist until the bitter end. The ambiguity in the meaning of the ending is contained in the image of Jewel and Stein hand in hand, two characters whose irreconcilable perspectives on heroism question, yet do not reject, the adventure novel.<sup>240</sup>

A final feature leads me to suggest a partial parody of the adventure novel. Marlow’s account of Jim’s story in Patusan happens to be more

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<sup>239</sup> White explains that “language-color, the exotic language that had become a familiar attraction of the genre, created pictures of faraway places with strange words and place names. As Marryat had named the nautical world, thus effectively creating it for readers who had never left inland towns and cities, and Ballantyne had brought into existence South Sea Islands through such exotica as taro-roots and coco-nuts, and Haggard had made his readers see an unknown world of veldts and kraals and scherms, so Conrad too used a new vocabulary to create a place in reader’s imaginations of campoungs, praus, and punkahs, sarangs, sarongs, and tindals, a place peopled by Others with such names as Babalatchi and Syed Abdulla bin Selim, a place where colonial traders dealt in guttah percha and rattans and met on the verandahs of colonial outposts to exchange reassuring fictions.” (105)

<sup>240</sup> Kenneth Graham also notes Marlow’s indirect way of conveying doubts in the Patusan section, in *Indirections of the novel: James, Conrad, and Forster*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.

heroic and triumphant in his telling than in his writing to the privileged man. In the seamen's world of oral storytelling Jim would be reminiscent of the Rajah James Brooke; yet in what is to Conrad the contemporary medium of communication, writing, only one person in the novel will know the tragic end of the story. Walter Benjamin considered the novel as the modern means to disseminating fictions at the harsh expense of suppressing storytelling, and therefore condemning both author and reader to a uniquely modern type of isolation in the midst of a massive unreachable audience. The privileged reader—like Marlow the writer of the last part of Jim's story—will be condemned to isolation, but to the private isolation of being the only recipient of the “good many pages closely blackened and pinned together” (200), which restore the modern complexity that engendered the genuine interest of the story. In contrast to this, the various large audiences of Marlow's storytelling are left with the perfect heroic adventure story. In a neat paradox, that writing quality that will allow the frame narrator to tell Jim's story in the form of a novel which would be received by a wide readership, happens to serve the function in the novel of the opening a melancholic breach at the core of adventure fiction and travel writing that acknowledges the loss of heroic opportunities of the age. Indeed, in *Lord Jim* the written support serves to parody the adventure novel from within. The medium of the written word both guaranteed a massive audience for the adventure novel in the mid-nineteenth century, and rendered it a proper medium of education, suitable for fulfilling its official function as compulsory reading in public schools. But this genre was dying under Conrad's eyes, it was losing its *raison d'être*, as White suggests:

Conrad's need to demythologize a genre that had so influenced him came from his public and personal awareness that the dream was over, that the possibilities for great aspirations and noble deeds were closing down . . . The nostalgia, the romantic yearning for a more heroic past, is mixed with the realistic appraisal of man's universal imperfection, an understanding that all men are base and that “into the noblest cause men manage to put something of their baseness.” (108)

Marlow simultaneously endorses and challenges the genre from his idiosyncratic critical perspective, a point of view reinforced by the novel as a whole. Indeed, the process of demythologizing the genre cannot be limited to the second part of *Lord Jim*, it needs to go further. In fact, it is precisely its extraordinary contrast to the first part that establishes the same tension between refusal and endorsement of the

genre found in Marlow's perspective, structuring the novel's perfect unity. In my opinion, the use of the adventure novel as one among other genres has the effect, intelligently discerned by Jakob Lothe, of destabilizing the romance, but for the sake of the construction of a modernist novel. In Lothe's words,

Exploiting features of the adventure story, *Lord Jim* becomes a modernist novel by combining, and contrasting, these features with constituent elements of several subgenres of narrative fiction. . . . Conrad's employment of epic subgenres is not mechanical or repetitive in a manner the reader can preempt; rather, generic appropriation involves forms of inversion. It is the combination, repetition, and original use of aspects of different genres that prove innovative: characteristic features of each subgenre become constituent aspects of a novelistic project at once motivated and informed by Conrad's literary ambition to render a nuanced account of an alluring but elusive protagonist.<sup>241</sup>

As Lothe demonstrates, each narrative subgenre is elaborated in relation to those aspects of Jim's enigma it can clarify but it is never fully developed, thus breaking with the tradition of a text that corresponds almost completely to a single genre. It is by the narrative combination of genres that Conrad achieves the highly sophisticated form of this novel.

Regarding the adventure novel, the opposition of its narrative form to the several narrators that inform Marlow's telling, as well as its conversational character and his much more distant perception of Jim developed in the first part of the novel, where Jim's excessive "wandering" results in a "wondering" about him, place a question mark over Jim's story as it has been told in the Patusan section, and by extension over whether the effectiveness and the verisimilitude of the adventure novel as a narrative genre can provide a fair rendering of the colonial individual in remote countries ruled by apparently alien

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<sup>241</sup> Jakob Lothe, "Conrad's *Lord Jim*. Narrative and Genre." *Joseph Conrad: Voice, Sequence, History, Genre*. Ed. Jakob Lothe, Jeremy Hawthorn, and James Phelan. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2008, 252. Lothe analyses the function of the narrative subgenres of the sketch, the tale, the epigraph, the legend, the episode, the parable, the letter, the tragedy, the lyric poetry, and the novel itself. See a much briefer discussion of some literary generic approaches to the novel in Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pospiech, "The Mosaic Structure of *Lord Jim*: A Survey of the Genres and Literary Conventions Present in This 'Free and Wandering Tale'." *Beyond the Roots* 39-61.

values. Thus, the adventure novel in its almost perfect form destabilizes not only the genre itself but the very telling of its hero in a way that Jim remains trapped in his enigma by the novel's questioning of the narrative of his last years in Patusan.

However, if this seems to be one of the main narrative functions of the adventure novel motive, paradoxically it is no less important to acknowledge how it contributes to highlighting the racial aspects sparsely distributed throughout the *Patna* section. Indeed, Marlow's adoption of the genre following Jim's willingness to fashion himself into an imperial hero in what Jim thought would be his last opportunity, effectively brings into the foreground what had somehow remained behind the scenes in the first part. Jim is indirectly constructed upon a discussion of the stereotype of the English gentleman at the beginning of the novel, taking advantage of the audience's schemata of this stereotype; in the second part of *Lord Jim*, on the other hand, he is progressively being adjusted to the fixed standard of conduct. Jim's image as a gentleman is sculpted mainly in this second part where most of his excesses increasingly give way to conformation to the stereotype that has been questioned in the first part. Even though Marlow's ironic tone is maintained throughout the novel, he never hesitates in depicting the Patusani as fitting racial stereotypes, so that they may accomplish the same narrative function of minimizing the Other to construct the identity of "us" in opposition to "them," through the processes of metaphor and metonymy described by Bhabha. In his submission to generic assumptions, therefore, the adventure novel's appropriation and diffusion of the racialised Victorian discourse is adopted entire by Marlow not only to construct a racial story in the last section of the narrative, and therefore, related to the communities that European colonial powers mapped out in their nationalistic drive to fashion identities, but also to racialize the narrative enigma, thus the story of Jim—and the novel—as a whole. By constructing an imperial romance, Marlow intensifies the racial aspect of the story to restore Jim's tainted image, while at the same time using a troublesome individual case to discuss internal, British debates, and thereby reinforce the collective responsibility of what he calls "us."

In conclusion I want to underline that it is not a coincidence that Marlow places his heroic tale at the end of his telling, since it guarantees Jim's progression towards a success that is scarcely

questioned after a long and at once lofty and melancholic tale. For this purpose he chooses those “native” voices he considers better suited to his intention, cleverly rejecting Jewel’s discordant voice while making Tamb Itam’s his own. Though many ingredients in the Patusan narrative happen to be discordant, Jim’s greatness is effectively built upon racial terms, which constitute the essence of imperial discourse. Yet, although Jim’s ascent to the podium of heroic fiction is apparently straightforward, it is not so in Marlow’s closing remark of the novel, which reminds us of the “doubt” that would have us to return to the first part of *Lord Jim* to discover the complex response to Jim’s enigma that the novel leaves unsolved. And in this sense, seen from the point of view of ideology or Jim as representative of a collective identity, it is worth remembering Mark Conroy’s suggestion that

like the ideology he takes with him, Jim was always already contaminated by the larger colonial structure that he sought at one to justify and to deny. Indeed, when Marlow describes him as a ‘disembodied spirit astray amongst the passions of this earth, ready to surrender himself faithfully to the claim of his own world of shades,’ we are tempted to read it as a definite sign that Jim is an embodiment of ideology itself—an insubstantial mirage existing uncomfortably among brute material and social facts.<sup>242</sup>

It is precisely in this sense that we can view where the doubt read from the perspective of the collective identity already defined seems to rest: the narrative enigma is embodied both individually and collectively in Jim.

*Lord Jim* closes a perfect circle when rewriting an adventure novel at the end of a telling that would have appealed to the tastes of Conrad’s contemporaries, those who are probably a better fit for the community implied by Marlow when he refers to “one of us.” Marlow thus perfectly articulates the communal concern about the solidity of the standard of conduct throughout the novel, both in the conversations about Jim’s jump from the *Patna* as well as in developing the gentlemanly hero proper to the adventure fiction in Patusan. Furthermore, by inserting his popular heroic tale along with other

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<sup>242</sup> Mark Conroy, *Modernism and Authority: Strategies of legitimation in Flaubert and Conrad*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1985, 114. Conroy conclusively attributes a racial and national aspect (British Merchant Marine) to the *leitmotif* of the novel, “one of us,” which he eloquently explores in relation to Marlow’s narrative.

literary genres into a wider modern frame, Conrad shapes the passage from popular ideological literature to what Thomas Moser calls the “art novel,” while at the same time challenging modern literature to engage contemporary historical issues such as imperialism and to assign to them the same degree of importance given to those strictly modern concerns about the individual subject.<sup>243</sup>

Thus finally, if we are attentive to the forms in which cultural and racial stereotypes appear in *Lord Jim* we are compelled to insist upon two main points: on one hand, Conrad’s novel adheres to traditional representations of race through codes already fixed by the late nineteenth century; on the other hand, Conrad finds a new narrative way to represent race which allows his work to simultaneously endorse traditional racial stereotypes and to question them in the light of the controversies of his times and through the complex relation they bear to the codified discourse of late Victorian imperialism.

In regards to the first point, Conrad is a man of his time, since his fiction incarnates the racial discourses that flourished around him. Conrad’s contemporary reader easily recognized the assumed stereotypes of the gentleman, the Muslims, the colonized (in these case the Malays) and the half-castes, in virtually the same manner that he or she did so in the well-established genre of the adventure novel. The adventure novel, by familiarizing the reader with the Exotic setting and enabling the recollection of racial stereotypes, provided a reading frame. At first sight, it would seem that the legacy of this literary genre would lead Conrad to endorse imperialism in his work. But a closer look allows us to discern a partial revision of the genre.

In relation to the second point, Conrad offers a very significant transformation in the literary representation of race, possibly under the influence of writers such as Herman Melville. From the perspective of my argument, racial stereotypes need to be thought of as narrative forms so that we may grasp their narrative functions and the purposes they serve. We can thus conclude that racial stereotypes that deal with whiteness and the figure of the colonizer are brought into question. These in turn are embodied in the traditional stereotype of the English gentleman, which is the only one that is really challenged. Its questioning is subtle because the stereotype of the gentleman is developed with care throughout the narrative and is

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<sup>243</sup> Thomas C. Moser, “Preface to the first edition.” Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, ix.

somewhat incongruent with Jim's qualities. The doubt regarding Jim's gentility dissolves in the Patusan section, where his actions and qualities are redeemed in counterpoise with the stereotypes of the Other (both Malay and half-castes), much more present than the stereotype of pilgrims in the *Patna* section. Conrad endows the stereotypes with strict narrative features in order to make them direct the narrative to his ends. The development of the stereotypes, the choice of words, the collaboration in action and the telling of the characters that incarnate the racial stereotypes, along with their interplay as narrative constituents of the novel, function as the embodiment of the ambivalent essence of the stereotype of the Other described by Bhabha. Stereotypes of the Other definitely embody, in its metaphorical or metonymic functioning, the manifestation, questioning, restoration, and suspension of the stereotype of the English gentleman. Besides, the code of the adventure novel which frames most of the stereotypes also contributes to the ambivalence of racial representation in the novel. The revision of the genre performed by Marlow's frequently discordant discourse, his recollection of the doubt, and the ironic interplay between the two parts of the novel achieve the general questioning of racial stereotypes. In this intricate interplay of racial codes in the rendering of an ambivalent fiction, the conception of all racial stereotypes in *Lord Jim* as narrative forms that structure the telling and the moral significance of the story is crucial to understanding Conrad's complex approach to representing race in literature. Finally, in this light, and similar to the functioning of *Absalom, Absalom!*, the erosion of the credibility of the narrative voice not only reinforces the erosion of the beliefs encoded in the British imperialist discourse of the late nineteenth century seen here, but rather it discloses this particular ambivalence that the racial representation in *Lord Jim* contains. But I shall address these connections in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

## PART II

William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*



#### 4. "LET ME PLAY A WHILE NOW," OR THE ARTIFICE OF NARRATIVE RELIABILITY

Readers of William Faulkner are quite familiar with the writer's penchant for tricking his audiences when personal questions were addressed to him. Faulkner was not fond of intruders in his private life, nor did he believe that sharing his life experiences with the public was essential to reading his work. He made this clear in a letter to Malcolm Cowley when the latter asked him for an interview on his life and goals:

I would like the piece, except the biography part. You are welcome to it privately, of course. But I think that if what one has thought and hoped and endeavored and failed at is not enough, it must be explained and excused by what he has experienced, done or suffered, while he was not being an artist, then he and the one making the evaluation have both failed.<sup>244</sup>

As a way of assuaging the biographic interest of his audience, it is well known how Faulkner fooled his critics by constructing a fictional self-representation, which James Watson has studied in depth.<sup>245</sup> This is especially relevant in the telling of his adventures as an Air Force pilot during World War I. Indeed, for years people believed that he had been injured in the crash of an airplane he was piloting. Besides Faulkner's sense of humor evident in his efforts to avoid responding to bothersome questions, the Mississippian writer's strategy highlighted one of the most difficult issues at stake when thinking about literature: that of the relationship between the real and the fictional worlds, and the blurring of their boundaries. His life was as fictional as his literature was real. As he asserts in another letter to Cowley, "I'm inclined to think that my material, the South, is not very important to me. I just happen to know it, and don't have time in one life to learn another one and write at the same time."<sup>246</sup> This, in turn, translates the problem within fiction when we try to draw a line between true and non-true in relation to the Truth the literary work itself suggests through literary authority—a problem that not only

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<sup>244</sup> Letter to Malcolm Cowley, Sunday 7 May [1944], William Faulkner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*. Ed. Joseph Blotner. New York: Random House, 1977, 182.

<sup>245</sup> See James G. Watson, *William Faulkner. Self-Representation and Performance*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2000; and *Letters & Fictions*. Austin: Texas UP, 1987.

<sup>246</sup> Letter to Malcolm Cowley, Saturday [early Nov. 1944], *Ibid.*, 184.

concerns narrative but other genres such as poetry, essays, and drama. As we shall see, there is a clear exploration of this tension through the articulation of nuanced narrative voices in *Absalom, Absalom!*

In Faulkner, the relationship between the image of himself as a writer and that of himself as a man is not only perceived as complicated but it is consciously performed as such. If the former life experience as told by the Mississippian writer is eloquent enough, in the territory of his writing the greatest example commonly pointed out is his essay “Mississippi,” published in *Holiday* in April 1954.<sup>247</sup> This brilliant, “quasi-autobiographical” piece, as Noel Polk qualifies it, demonstrates precisely this point of ambivalence, of reconciliation between fiction and history, and within the piece itself between real and fictional information, which places the text between essay and short story.<sup>248</sup> There, the mixture of fictional families such as “the De Spains and Compsons and McCaslins and Ewells” (12) and the Snopes live together with Faulkner’s women, Caroline and “Miss Hestelle” (42), and Mississippian towns such as Jefferson naturally coexist with the real “Hattiesburg, and Laurel, and Meridian, and Canton” (32). Likewise, the main focus of the narrative is “the boy,” “the young man” and later “the middle-aged,” whose proximity to the narrator makes the reader feel too close to Faulkner, “Mr. Bill.” As Polk underlines, “‘Mississippi’”s narrative moves freely, fluidly, back and forth between Faulkner’s two Mississippis, as if to demonstrate just how thin the line separating them is” (“Afterword 82).

Indeed, these fictional and non-fictional elements naturally coexist in “Mississippi” because fiction and life do so. In this, Faulkner’s real, distorting voice which introduced fiction into personal experience is at once as reliable and as unreliable as the voice in fiction which introduces history. Ambivalence lies at the heart of Faulkner’s voices because fiction and reality, and thus imagination and knowledge, are all part of the experiences we live and the experiences we tell. This is precisely what we find in the complicated artifice of multiple narrative voices in *Absalom, Absalom!* The blurring exposes the limits of fiction and the limits of history as artificial, but for this very reason they are

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<sup>247</sup> William Faulkner, *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters*. Ed. James B. Meriwether. New York: The Modern Library, 2004, 11-43.

<sup>248</sup> Noel Polk, “Afterword: Welty and Faulkner and the Southern Literary Tradition.” *Endora Welty On William Faulkner*. Ed. Noel Polk. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2003, 81.

allowed to permeate each other much more freely and profoundly. This is the way I want Faulkner's voices to be understood in this section.<sup>249</sup>

This chapter aims to show how *Absalom, Absalom!* reflects on the limits of knowledge and the limits of language as an instrument to attaining a historical story (in the fictional reality) through the exploration of the problem of reliability. The novel questions the capacity of individuals to tell a story which pertains to the past and which is articulated through memory, and, when this is flawed or does not answer the questions posed by the story, through imagination or, eventually, even through fiction. As in *Lord Jim*, the problem of reliability is articulated around a narrative enigma that stimulates a multiplicity of voices, which in this case are juxtaposed in the text, offering, in contrast to Conrad's novel, a multiplicity of accounts that reveal different degrees of reliability, establishing different distances between teller and tale and different conceptions of storytelling. The narrative tension expressed by these juxtaposed accounts and the narrative voices in their struggle for a conspicuously eroded narrative authority underpins the elaboration of narrative reliability. The approach to the narrative enigma draws a clear progression that leads to a solution, as the narrative in fact gradually diverges from the known facts and begins to rely primarily on the power of convincing through words. Gaining conviction is a matter not only of Mr Compson's persuasion but of Shreve's fictionalizing within the real realm of the fiction, to the extent that what is offered as the resolution of the enigma is in fact most probably false, or, at the very least, uncertain. Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* works the degrees of reliability in such a way that the novel as a whole stands in imbalance, between various degrees of credibility and full unreliability, shaping the

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<sup>249</sup> Before getting into a very detailed analysis of the novel, I would like not to miss the opportunity to mention here some general studies in *Absalom, Absalom!* which not for remaining unquoted later in my argument are less important. Richard P. Adams, *Faulkner: Myth and Motion*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968; Melvin Backman, *Faulkner: The Major Years: A Critical Study*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1966; Irving Howe, *William Faulkner: A Critical Study*. New York: Vintage Books, 1962; Michael Millgate, *The Achievement of William Faulkner*. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1978; Olga Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner: A Critical Interpretation*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1964; Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: First Encounters*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1983. See the recently published bibliographical study for further reading, John E. Bassett, *William Faulkner: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism Since 1988*. Lanham, Toronto and Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2009.

narrative ambivalence that will force the very uncertainty of its racial representation. We shall examine this in some detail.

#### 4. 1. Knowledge and language in *Absalom, Absalom!*

##### a) Creating Narrative Tension: Narrative enigma, narrative authority, and polyphony

The narrative enigma structures *Absalom, Absalom!* as well as it structures *Lord Jim*. Yet in Faulkner's novel the enigma does not belong to the realm of morality in a character's behavior but it constitutes a genuine gap of information in the story. As in Conrad's novel, the enigma comes from a secret in the story that is placed as the motor of the narrative, and it has practically the same functions. The enigma is enunciated at the very beginning of the novel when Quentin thinks about Rosa's nephew "who served for four years in the same company with his sister's fiancé and then shot the fiancé to death before the gates to the house where the sister waited in her wedding gown on the eve of the wedding and then fled, vanished, none knew where" (8).<sup>250</sup> Henry Sutpen's murder of Charles Bon thus traces an enigma typical of a detective novel. The four narrators' efforts are dedicated to explaining it, by piecing together the bits of information available to them. Quentin is the recipient of the stories, and Shreve the impulse not only for reconstructing but for solving it, even when "[i]t is incredible. It just does not explain" (83). Interestingly, Joseph Reed observes that the unfolding of the narrative enigma in *Absalom, Absalom!* differs in strategy from the conventions of the detective novel because

Mystery-solving brings us to another peculiar barrier. Suspense omission and accumulation of evidence are familiar to every reader of mystery stories. But there's something funny here. Narrative intensity,

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<sup>250</sup> The extreme indeterminacy in the novel has lead Nancy E. Batty to even doubt on the very enigma itself in an effort to present the radical uncertainty of knowledge in the novel in her article, "The Riddle of *Absalom, Absalom!*: Looking at the Wrong Blackbird?" *Mississippi Quarterly* 47.3 (Summer 1994): 460-488; on the relationship of the mystery with the idea of loss, see Philip Novak, "Signifying Silences: Morrison's Soundings in the Faulknerian Void." *Unflinching Gaze: Morrison and Faulkner Re-Envisioned*. Ed. Carol A. Kolmerten, Stephen M. Ross, and Judith Bryant Wittenberg. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1997. 199-215.

textual density and suspense mechanisms ought to underline crises or lead up to revelations—here they seem to heighten what leads up to crises or, anticlimactically, to draw out what leads away from them. What we expect to take a lot of time takes very little, and what we expect will just go band, goes on and on. The book’s rhythm refuses to be dramatic; indeed, it is almost insistently antidramatic and anticlimactic. The patterns of revelation and connection continually and consistently frustrate conventional suspense and stock fictional expectations.<sup>251</sup>

Faulkner complicates the narrative strategy by understanding that, as explained by Ricardo Piglia, the enigma offers the possibility to the writer of constructing a multiple text, around which all the voices weave their own explanations to create a nest where the only missing thing seems to be its central piece. The enigma as narrative technique, thus, already presents a way of establishing a tension for the reader that shall keep her or him captivated by the reading, propelled forward, at the same time that it displays an octopus strategy of multiple voices tied to the hollow of its mouth.<sup>252</sup> Strikingly enough, by the end of the novel the enigma also becomes a “racial” mystery, since the speculations around the motives for Henry Sutpen’s murder of Charles Bon grow as they appear determined by “race,” first ambiguously pointing to the prevention of miscegenation, and finally settling on this. As the novel approaches the narrative enigma, the racial background invades the stage and racializes the story, in a process and dynamics very much indebted to the strategies of *Lord Jim*. The enigma locates a blind spot upon which the problem of reliability is constructed, forging a multilayered narrative tension that is articulated through the several components that modulate and organize narrative voice in the novel. Narrative tension appears in such an extreme form in *Absalom, Absalom!* that both the act of telling and the act of reading become a defying *tour de force*.

If narrative tension arises from the very uncomfortable fact that there is something missing in story that obstructs the narration, it is elaborated not only in the narrative enigma but also through narrative authority and the aforementioned polyphony. As I have argued in the

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<sup>251</sup> Joseph W. Reed, *Faulkner’s Narrative*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1973, 149.

<sup>252</sup> In relation to the reader’s interaction with the text, see Christine de Montauzon, *Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom! and Interpretability: The Inexplicable Unseen*. Bern, Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 1985.

case of *Lord Jim*, narrative authority is a key principle that enables the writer to regulate and explore narrative reliability, because it graduates the distance between the narrator's telling and the story presented. Authority in the novel is once again very hard to establish in *Absalom, Absalom!* As we shall see in the following section, the authority of the voices is rendered even more ambiguous due to the intersection of Southern oratory and fictional voices. But what I want to note at this stage is that the erosion of narrative authority is a fundamental device used to build narrative tension, and which underlies the questioning of narrative credibility. It is on this point that Faulkner's novel strengthens the possibilities offered by Conrad's *Lord Jim*.

If *Lord Jim*'s interrogates narrative authority by its use of narrative levels, *Absalom, Absalom!* sources to a greater extent to polyphony. In comparison to *Lord Jim*, Faulkner's novel moves even further in the dissolution of fictional narrative authority, first of all in the frame narrator's discourse. In becoming mainly a judging instance rather than a figure of authority, the frame narrator's traditional objectivity and omniscience are so highly questioned that it both inherits and departs from the tradition of predominant nineteenth-century narrators. Secondly, with regards to the other narrative voices, faced with such personalized narrators—most of them participants in Sutpen's story—we immediately acknowledge the warning of keeping a distance from their tellings. Whenever they are endowed with narrative authority, this is always partial. This is very evident in all the narrators. Life experience determines the Jeffersonian narratives; not so much Shreve's, whose narrative authority is questioned by the strong influence of his personality—a feature not exclusive to him, but clearly emphasized as interfering.

We can view the constant lack of relevant information for reconstructing Sutpen's story as another source contributing to the dissolution of narrative authority. The characterization of the narrators evinces that they do not possess the relevant information either from experience or through access to all its possible bearers. This is particularly remarkable in the case of Shreve who, by not being cautious about the unknown data, ends up transgressing the barrier of knowledge and becomes an unreliable narrator. In fact, as we shall see, his narrative authority degrades as the story progresses, even though the reader is left with the contrary impression on a first reading, understanding Shreve's as the most detached and complete version of

Sutpen's story. Thus, as Hugh Ruppersburg puts it, "[a]s discrepancies and contradictions begin to multiply, as Quentin's curiosity and emotional involvement mount, the reader expands his attention to include the characters who tell the story—primarily Miss Rosa, Mr Compson, Quentin, and Shreve. This added concern with narrators *as* characters casts doubt on the credibility of what they say."<sup>253</sup> The dissolution of narrative authority leaves the reader an orphan, a wanderer in the bowels of Hades deprived of the privilege of Virgil's precious hand.

It is clear, finally, that polyphony is the main source of tension in the narrative.<sup>254</sup> The four character narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Rosa Coldfield, Mr Compson, Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon recount the same story by telling a variety of episodes that continuously overlap. Their versions are extremely different and intensely revised as they are retold, which induces a feeling of confusion in the reader, both in technical and contextual terms. The narrators' constant time changing, the intermingling of narrative voices, and the fragmentation of the story produce a tension that demands from the reader the titanic effort of holding all the information provided without a chance to calmly organize it.<sup>255</sup> One might have the feeling that, as the novel's reviewer George Marion O'Donnell noted in 1936, "difficulty is probably legitimate in fiction; but it has a very tenuous legitimacy, being always dangerous because it may perform the decidedly illegitimate function of standing between the reader and his final understanding of the characters and of the

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<sup>253</sup> Hugh M. Ruppersburg, *Voice and Eye in Faulkner's Fiction*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1983, 83.

<sup>254</sup> Let us recall here Mikhaïl M. Bakhtin's definition of polyphony in the novel: "En fait, les éléments incompatibles de la matière littéraire de Dostoïevski sont répartis entre plusieurs mondes et entre plusieurs consciences autonomes; ils représentent non pas un point de vue unique, mais plusieurs points de vu, entiers et autonomes, et ce ne sont pas directement les matériaux, mais les différents mondes, consciences et points de vue qui s'associent en une unité supérieure, au second degré, si l'on peut dire, celle du roman polyphonique." Mikhaïl M. Bakhtin, *La Poétique de Dostoïevski*. Paris: Seuil, 1970, 48. [*Problemy poetiki Dostoïevkovo*, 1929.]

<sup>255</sup> Unfortunately, I cannot focus on the device of time in *Absalom, Absalom!*, yet it is one of its central aspects. For this topic see, for example, Carolyn Norman Slaughter, "*Absalom, Absalom!*: 'Fluid Cradle of Events (Time)'" *The Faulkner Journal* 6.2 (Spring 1991): 65-84.

story, instead of helping him toward that understanding.”<sup>256</sup> Indeed, as in Conrad’s novels, and above all in *Lord Jim*, textuality frequently blurs the vision of the story, entangling the reader in a process of deciphering language which exposes the pressure of the *différance*.

Different personal pasts have shaped a range of perspectives on each character in Sutpen’s story, just as different ideological points of view have determined the representation of race in the novel. Mikhail Bakhtin argued for this link between polyphony and historical contexts in *La Poétique de Dostoïevski*:

L’époque elle-même a rendu possible le roman polyphonique. Dostoïevski était *subjectivement* mêlé aux divisions et aux conflits de son époque. Il changeait de “résidence,” errait de l’une à l’autre et, sous ce rapport, les plans coexistants dans la vie sociale et objective étaient des étapes de sa vie et de son devenir spirituel. Cette expérience personnelle était profonde, mais dans son œuvre, Dostoïevski ne lui a pas donné d’expression monologique immédiate; elle lui a seulement permis de mieux comprendre, dans leur développement extensif, les contradictions entre les différents êtres humains, mais non pas celles qui existent à l’intérieur d’une conscience isolée. Ainsi les conflits objectifs de l’époque ont déterminé l’art de Dostoïevski, non pas du fait qu’il les a lui-même vécus au cours de son évolution spirituelle, mais parce qu’ils les a vus objectivement comme formant des forces coexistantes, concomitantes (vision approfondie par l’expérience personnelle, il est vrai). (64)

The technique of juxtaposing such contrastive views makes the story both much more complex and much more obscure to the reader eager to discern between objective facts and imagination, opinion and prejudice. This again creates a tension between clarity and obscurity, a struggle in which all narrators pull the reader towards themselves—just as Quentin is dragged by all his tellers.

But Faulkner has a particular way of utilizing dialogism, as Welsey Morris and Barbara Alverson Morris astutely point out, since “what distinguishes Faulkner is his intensification of this dialogic webbing into a sense of community.” This community is that of “the South” in its creation of a discourse of identity after the Civil War, as we shall

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<sup>256</sup> George Marion O’Donnell, “Mr. Faulkner flirts with Failure.” *Nashville Banner*, October 25, 1936, Magazine section, p. 8. *William Faulkner: The Contemporary Reviews*. Ed. Thomas Inge. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996, 143.

see in the next chapter.<sup>257</sup> To render those marks of identity effective, all voices borrow from the Southern oratory. Indeed, the several voices

narrate or act out, in fact create, the fragmentation, the polyvocality, the collapse and disintegration of majority culture: the deconstruction of the myth of the Old South. This fatality can be narrated only from within a community of narrators, from within a dialogue of southern mythmaking which ambiguously preserves as it critiques and disperses, but it is also always articulated from the margins, at the threshold, on the limits, of that communal discourse.<sup>258</sup>

It is particularly at this point where the tension between the narrative voices arises because, as Morris understands them, if they are ostensibly differentiated, they nonetheless share common grounds and a language that bind them into a community.<sup>259</sup>

While narrative tension constitutes one of the central axes of the Modern novel, in this case it is not gratuitous, for as Juan Benet insisted when discussing Joyce, Faulkner and Conrad, literature aims at showing the feelings and pains of the heart.<sup>260</sup> In this case the heart is not only personal but also collective, shared.<sup>261</sup> The tension displays both the strife of the human being as an individual in her or his passage through the world, and the collective tension resulting from particular historical contexts. If this holds true for Joseph Conrad, it manifestly applies to William Faulkner. As we will see, Faulkner's South was still struggling to emerge from its conflictive situation, the

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<sup>257</sup> For a comparison of Faulkner's dialogism to Toni Morrison's, see Catherine Gunther Kodat, "A Postmodern *Absalom, Absalom!*, a Modern *Beloved*: The Dialectic Form." *Unflinching Gaze: Morrison and Faulkner Re-Envisioned* 181-198.

<sup>258</sup> Wesley Morris with Barbara Alverson Morris, *Reading Faulkner*. Madison: UP of Wisconsin, 1989, 197 and 198.

<sup>259</sup> Utz Riese argues that this kind of narrative voice helps to create a new ethical space in "Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and Kafka's *The Castle*: Ethical Space in Modernity's Discourse of History." *Faulkner, His Contemporaries, and His Posterity*. Ed. Waldemar Zacharasiewicz. Tübingen and Basel: Francke Verlag, 1993. 77-86.

<sup>260</sup> Juan Benet, *Una biografía literaria*. Valladolid: Cuatro Ediciones, 2007.

<sup>261</sup> In his overview of Faulkner's literary themes and techniques in comparison to other Modernist writers, Peter Swiggart notes this point (*The Art of Faulkner's Novels*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1962). Apart from the quoted in this chapter, see on Faulkner's narrative forms the always-insightful Albert J. Guerard in his essay "Faulkner the Innovator." *The Maker and the Myth*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1977. Ed. Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1978. 71-88.

product of North-South as much as Black-White relations. Seen from this angle, the aim of this section is to show how profoundly the tension created in the narrative texture of *Absalom, Absalom!*—which we generally attribute to the Modernist literary period—contributes to the embodiment and display of racial tension and the complexity of race relations in the South.

## b) The problem of knowing and the challenges of language

Like Conrad in *Lord Jim*, Faulkner articulates the problem of reliability in *Absalom, Absalom!* through a reflection on the limitations of knowledge and the problematic nature of language as a means of communication and apprehension of reality—in the fiction, the fictional reality. Indeed, as we are going to see in detail in the next section, the narrators' access to information about Sutpen's story varies in its sources, but is limited in each case. This creates the well-known effect Faulkner described to a group of students at the University of Virginia:

I think that no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it. Someone else looks at it and sees a slightly awry phase of it. But taken all together, the truth is in what they saw though nobody saw the truth intact. So these are true as far as Miss Rosa and as Quentin saw it. Quentin's father saw what he believed was truth, that was all he saw. But the old man was himself a little too big for the people no greater in stature than Quentin and Miss Rosa and Mr Compson to see all at once. It would have taken perhaps a wiser or more tolerant or more sensitive or more thoughtful person to see him as he was. It was, as you say, thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird. But the truth, I would like to think, comes out, that when the reader has read all these thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird, the reader has his own fourteenth image of that blackbird which I would like to think is the truth.<sup>262</sup>

Whether the reader can attain the Truth and what this Truth actually consists of is itself unknowable. But what is certain is that what the novel places in the foreground from the first to the last page is the problem of knowing, and the complex dynamics of perceiving and believing, and thus—like *Lord Jim*—establishes, through the interrogation of believing, a value in Truth as a point of reference.

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<sup>262</sup> *Faulkner in the University*. Ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner. Charlottesville and London: UP of Virginia, 1995, 273.

Beliefs can be questioned only because there is an acknowledgment of Truth. Obviously, Faulkner is neither the first literary author to consider the relativism and subjectivism in the construction of reality, nor is he the first to explore it through narrative voice. Nonetheless, his elaboration of narrative voice in relation to the credibility of discourse definitely marks a step forward from Conrad's already complex use of this literary technique. In the process he does not only sophisticate the figure of the character narrator, but relies on extracting the narrative possibilities of juxtaposing several voices that have a limited perspective, and that are not able to fulfill their knowledge expectations.

This limitation of knowledge is worked around several narrative enigmas which function as warnings of the mysterious core of the story, such as when Mr Compson says "And your grandfather never knew if it was Clytie who watched, kept in touch by some means" (162), or "They may have been what slowed him down. But it was not enough to clarify the story much." (204), and "Mr Colfield: what was that?" / "I dont know," Quentin said. "Nobody ever did know for certain. It was something about a bill of landing, some way he persuaded Mr Coldfield to use his credit" (214), and "He didn't know it then. Grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it" (220). The narrators' dealing with withheld narrative enigmas has the effect of confusing the reader, as well as the narrators themselves.<sup>263</sup> As Shreve comments to Quentin:

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<sup>263</sup> Estella Schoenberg analyses the several errors committed by the narrator and the critics, who assume facts for which there is no reliable evidence in her study *Old Tales and Talking: Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and Related Works*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1977. I cannot delve too deeply here into the effects on the reader of the limited access to relevant information in the novel. However, this is a crucial point, since the reader is bewildered by the same problems as the narrator. In this sense, for example, Cleanth Brooks has studied the degrees of knowledge of the narrators and our problems as readers. On the reader's difficulties he points out that: "Like the earlier, the later provides a résumé, in Shreve's cheerful mock-heroic style, of events evidently narrated to him earlier by Quentin, yet there is no place *in the text of the novel* where we are allowed to read the details of such a conversation between Quentin and Shreve." ("The Narrative Structure of *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Towards Yoknapatanpha and Beyond*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1978, 314.) The either elusive or silent strategy is also the argument for the "failure of language" in Floyd C. Watkins, "Thirteen Ways of Talking about a Blackbird." *The Flesh and the Word: Eliot, Hemingway, Faulkner*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1971. 216-233.

“Your old man,” Shreve said. “When your grandfather was telling this to him, he didn’t know any more what your grandfather was talking about than your grandfather knew what the demon was talking about when the demon told it to him, did he? And when your old man told it to you, you wouldn’t have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn’t been out there and seen Clytie. Is that right?” (226)

Looking back to the novel, the centrality of Charles Bon seems almost ridiculous when her most direct witness, Miss Rosa Coldfield, confesses that: “*I had never seen him (I never saw him. I never saw him dead. I heard a name, I saw a photograph, I helped to make a grave: and that was all*” (121), which invites Robert Dale Parker to note that “[i]n fact, despite her incantatory insistence, it turns out that much of what Rosa tells Quentin she saw, she never did see” (24).<sup>264</sup>

After many attempts to make the pieces of the puzzle fit together, with the most reliable help of a preserved letter by Charles Bon to Judith, the witnesses of all Jefferson as well as personal experiences, and the less reliable resource to conjecture and imagination, Mr Compson still has to admit in the most powerful passage referring to the problem of knowledge that

It is just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that’s it: they dont explain and we are not supposed to know. We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sound to us like Sanskrit or Chocktaw; we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable. Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letter from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you

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<sup>264</sup> Robert Dale Parker, *Absalom, Absalom! The Questioning of Fictions*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991, 24. See also his previous book *Faulkner and the Novelistic Imagination*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1985.

have forgotten nothing made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (83)

And that is what narrators do: read and re-read, tell and retell the stories in order to find out. However, the narrative enigma—characteristically in the Modern novel, as Benet affirmed—is not solved at the end because certain gaps simply defy explanation.

The effect of scattered information is still more complicated for a reader that frequently has problems in identifying the provenance of the voices in the novel (whether they are thought, listened, pronounced or just read)<sup>265</sup> so that the sense of rumor and confusion are added to the sense of the disintegration of narrative authority, as Sonja Basic observes by her example of chapter V:

The paradoxical confusion of voices in chapter V between Rosa telling, Rosa monologizing, or both of these alternatives being streamed through Quentin's memory, brings us to the point where it becomes impossible for us to determine with any authority "who" speaks. But this is, I think, exactly the point: we are not meant to know. The origin of the narrative instance seems to be blurred on purpose, narrative authority has been withdrawn.<sup>266</sup>

Limited access to knowledge opens the gates to the discussion of how narrative authority contributes to shaping reliability in the narrative. Miss Rosa, Mr Compson and Quentin Compson rely on knowledge as the basis for their storytelling, and aim at reconstructing a story that had happened in historical time. Shreve is a more complicated case,

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<sup>265</sup> The principal difficult passages with regards to narrative voice are Chapter V and pages 150, 174, 285, 289. For an analysis of the point of view related to access to information, of what the narrators know and the filters of narrative voice, see Thomas E. Connolly, "Point of view in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Modern Fiction Studies* 27.2 (Summer 1981): 255-272; for a tracing of knowledge see also, Floyd C. Watkins, "What happens in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Modern Fiction Studies* 13.1 (Spring 1967): 79-87. For a study on the blending of narrative voices in Faulkner from a Bergsonian perspective, see Paul Douglas, "Deciphering Faulkner's Uninterrupted Sentence" and "Faulkner and the Bergsonian Self." *Bergson, Eliot and American Literature*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1986. 118-165.

<sup>266</sup> Sonja Basic, "Faulkner's Narrative: Between Involvement and Distancing." *Faulkner's Discourse An International Symposium*. Ed. Lothar Hönnighausen. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1989, 144.

since his attraction to fiction rather than historical knowledge as the basis upon which to construct a story radically challenges conventional ways of looking at Truth. The terrain of unreliability becomes a terrain of ambivalence that so bewilders the reader that she or he finds themselves possessed by the disturbing problem of the nature of knowledge itself, and what complex relation we can establish with it.

As we shall see below, the fact that the novel forcefully underlines the limits of the human subject's access to knowledge significantly contributes to sophisticate the degrees of persuasion, which even approach unreliability. The doubt cast in *Absalom, Absalom!*s over the reliability of the information reaches its highest peak in the heatedly debated Genealogy and Chronologies, which originally contradicted the already conflicting dates and facts within the fictional text, producing a sense of complete confusion, in an effect that resembles Juan Benet's *Volverás a Región*'s obscure chronology and genealogy.<sup>267</sup>

To further complicate the problem of accessibility to knowledge, language as an alternative clue to eye witnessing often seems to become the outstanding source of knowledge. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Jefferson's rumors and oral means of communication of stories in

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<sup>267</sup> As Pamela Dalziel has observed: "As numerous critics have pointed out, the Chronology is inconsistent, both in itself and in relation to the preceding narratives. The most frequently remarked contradictions involve the years of Ellen's birth and death, the year and place of Bon's birth, the spelling of the name of Bon's son, the disease with kills both Judith and Bon's son, and the year of Rosa and Quentin's visit to Sutpen's Hundred. . . . A close reading of the novel discovers a dizzying number of such contradictions—both within the individual narratives and between them — and suggests the futility of any attempt to create a definitive chronology. . . . The factual discrepancies do of course contribute to the text's persistent and evidently deliberate problematization of "truth" and history, to its virtual denial of the very possibility of objective knowledge of the past. I would, however, be absurd to claim that all contradictions were consciously inserted" ("*Absalom, Absalom!*: The Extension of Dialogic Form." *Mississippi Quarterly* 45.3, Summer 1992, 280-2) See another study of *Absalom, Absalom!*s paratexts in Robert W. Hamblin, "Longer than Anything': Faulkner's 'Grand Design' in *Absalom, Absalom!*?" *Faulkner and the Artist*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, 1993. Ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1996. 269-293. These paratexts served as an example of a broader set of inconsistencies if the intertextuality between the Yoknapatawpha novels is studied as Martin Kreiswirth did in his essay "Intertextuality, Transference, and Postmodernism in *Absalom, Absalom!*: The Production and Reception of Faulkner's Fictional World." *Faulkner and Postmodernism*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1999. Ed. John N. Duvall and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2002. 109-123.

general impede the exact transmission of what is conventionally called objective information, which is precisely the criticism of *Chance* made by Henry James. Like Joseph Conrad's works, Faulkner's are also very concerned with the paradox of language: the need we have for language to apprehend and express reality and its limits in doing so.<sup>268</sup> As Miss Rosa declares, language can tell everything and nothing:

*I will tell you what he did and let you be the judge. (Or try to tell you, because there are some things for which three words are three too many, and three thousand words that many words too less, and this is one of them. It can be told; I could take that many sentences, repeat the bold blank naked and outrageous words just as he spoke them, and bequeath you only that same aghast and outraged unbelief I knew when I comprehended what they meant; or take three thousand sentences and leave you only that Why? Why? and Why? that I have asked and listened to for almost fifty years.)* (138)

As an example that illuminates the sagacity of Rosa's observation, Louis D. Rubin notes

"*I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*" What that last paragraph tells us, too, is the inadequacy of language, of words, to articulate the complexity of Quentin Compson's emotional experience. As if the single abstract verb proposed by Shreve McCannon could possibly comprehend the intensity and complication of Quentin's response to the process of discovery and recognition that he has just completed! (Yet it is through language that we are enabled to understand this; for we are reading a novel).<sup>269</sup>

As Rosa Coldfield notes, the narrators' language is so charged with their perceptions and their tormented personalities that to distinguish between events and subjective impressions and emotions is nearly

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<sup>268</sup> There has been much criticism noting this theme in the novel. As an example, Arthur F. Kinney observes that "The act of narration is a reiterative point in *Absalom, Absalom!*: personal story, like regional definition, is a story. Human consciousness operates the same way for both. Because empirical experience is, sooner or later, cradled in the mind's constructs, history, fiction, biography, and autobiography all take the shape of narrative. Yet so claiming *Absalom, Absalom!* redeems and reemphasizes the power and poetry of such human shapes for truth. Even while it admits the inadequacy of language and the fundamental mysteries in events, *Absalom, Absalom!* confirms the potency of words." (*Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style as Vision*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1978, 196.)

<sup>269</sup> Louis D. Rubin, Jr. "William Faulkner: Why, the Very *Idea!*" *Faulkner and Ideology*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1992. Ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995, 340.

impossible.<sup>270</sup> Of course, this is because they cannot, indeed, be separated. But what will the listener's perspective of Sutpen and the story be if not multilayered, flexible even imagined? We shall take a closer look at the narrators' subjective perspectives in the following section.<sup>271</sup>

Furthermore, the construction of reality is not only affected by the minds and experience of the characters but also by the predetermination of their views resulting from their personal absorption or rejection of the cultural codes appropriate to the context, which the characters, the narrators, Faulkner, and us as readers project onto the reality we live, the reality we tell, and the reality we read.<sup>272</sup> This is also expressed through language, as we have seen and will continue to observe. As J. Hills Miller remarks, many passages in *Absalom, Absalom!*

parabolically express the failure of realistic mimesis. They express the inability to get the story to come out right, the failure either to understand it and so to have done with it and free oneself from it, on the other hand, to understand it and so to take possession of its meaning as one's heritage, one's familial and historical birthright. Such passages express the impossibility either of finishing the story or of

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<sup>270</sup> Likewise, this merging also affects temporality in the novel, since "It is as though this effort to explain his Southern heritage to an outsider destroys all logical connections, all rational categories, and moves him (with Shreve) into a timeless oneiric realm where truth reveals itself through the dramatic form of symbolic enactments. In this realm, the narrators experience a simultaneity of past and present which often makes them and the characters they re-create virtually indistinguishable, so that the reader finds it increasingly hard to determine whether the novel actually renders a factual picture of the past, or whether, for Faulkner, the importance of the Sutpen saga resides in the various ways it mirrors the inner landscape of the narrators" (Richard Forrer, "Absalom, Absalom!: Story-telling As a Mode of Transcendence." *The Southern Literary Journal* 9 (1976), 28.

<sup>271</sup> To the narrators' subjectivity we need to add the non-narrating characters' subjectivity. For a study focused on the latter, see Robert Crist, *Language & Being in Faulkner*. Athens: B. Giannikios & B. Caldis Publications, 1989.

<sup>272</sup> On this, see Philip M. Weinstein's approach to the construction of identity in art and in the reader in "Thinking I Was I Was Not Who Was Not Was Not Who": The Vertigo of Faulknerian Identity." *Faulkner and the Craft of Fiction*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1987. Ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson and London: UP of Mississippi, 1989. 172-193.

continuing it in one's own life except as the repetition, once again, of the failure to make it come out right.<sup>273</sup>

Forced by the exigencies of space to be brief, I will not persist here in the far too well-trodden theme of the subjectivism in Modern literature, except to draw attention to it as a structural way to organizing narrative voice in *Absalom, Absalom!*, as Hillis Miller does.

Faulkner's expression of these distinctly Modern themes—the problem of access to knowledge and the problem of language as the only yet unreliable transmitter of knowledge—works to decisively erode the idea that narrative voices are a source of authority rather than part of the complicated tangle of authoritative relations in fiction. As narrative voices are discarded as sources of omniscience and conveyors of the novels' "messages" in a radical dissolution of conventional narrative authority, persuasion becomes the primary means of its resurrection. As I have stated for *Lord Jim*, persuasion is the source that, given a narrative enigma, forges the path to the telling of a story. Persuasion provides in the form of rhetoric what knowledge cannot supply with such intensity that rhetoric itself provides a new kind of narrative authority when gaps of information are encountered in the story being told. This new narrative authority is rooted in the power to convince the audience by means of language rather than knowledge.

Furthermore, it is precisely at this point that orality regains the respect it held from antiquity to the Modern age as a source of authority.<sup>274</sup> But Faulkner goes even beyond Conrad's elaboration of this source: Faulkner's power of persuasion is more effective when this oral authority is endowed with the rhetorical mastery of Southern oratory in *Absalom, Absalom!* We shall explore this in some detail.

Indeed, orality accomplishes the task of bridging the formal and the historical aspect in both *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* But it is in the latter novel where this is more formally present. Orality frequently sources to traditional Southern oratory in Faulkner's novels, and

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<sup>273</sup> J. Hillis Miller, "Two Relativisms: Point of View and Indeterminacy in the Novel *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Relativism in the Arts*. Ed. Betty Jean Craige. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1983, 155.

<sup>274</sup> For a helpful study on orality, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

particularly in this one. This oratory functions in the South as conveyor of the values of the commonality, and emerges with great force both in the debates over slavery in the decades prior to the Civil War, as well as at the end of the century, when the discourse of the Southern myth, the Old South or the Lost Cause were being produced, as we will see in the next chapter. Waldo Braden, who has dedicated a good deal of effort to defining the Southern oratory, traces the origins of this tradition to the growth and popularity of the oral tradition due to the factors of ruralism, religion, the legal practice, politicking, the popularity of the literary societies and school presentations.<sup>275</sup> These diverse sources helped to build the community referred to by Benjamin in “The storyteller” and lent force to oratory in the South. As Braden explains: “Antebellum southerners preferred having problems talked out, enjoyed face-to-face encounters, and took pleasure in hearing lawyers, preachers, and politicians let loose their oratorical devices. Such listeners gained much information, understanding, and entertainment in the public forum. In turn, they provided an atmosphere that encouraged the developing mode of southern rhetoric” (*The Oral Tradition* 43). The regional myths are transmitted mainly through oratory since it had traditionally maintained its attractiveness, because “at the moment of utterance in the speeches of a Vardaman, Bilbo, Watson, Tillman, Wallace, or Maddox, the myth is highly moving, particularly before rural audiences conditioned by its frequent repetition” (Ibid. 73). Such is the power of oratory that those myths “kept alive cultural isolation and even racial hatred in the South” (Ibid. 74). In fact, there is a mutual bestowal of authority between myth and oratory: myths create a commonality that believes, thereby reinforcing the effectiveness of the means through which they are uttered and, simultaneously, oratory conveys the power of myth through the effective use of language.

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<sup>275</sup> Waldo W. Braden, *The Oral Tradition in the South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983, 26-38. The last chapter of this book, “The Rhetoric of a Closed Society” explains the relevance of the official rhetoric in the encouragement of Negrophobia in the South. See, more specifically, his edited collections of essays, *Oratory in the Old South, 1828-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1970) and *Oratory in the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1979). See also, James Perrin Warren, *Culture of Eloquence. Oratory and Reform in Antebellum America*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1999. For relevant examples of oratory in the South, see the anthology, W. Stuart Towns, *Oratory and Rhetoric in the Nineteenth-Century South: A Rhetoric of Defense*. Westport and London: Praeger, 1998.

Therefore, in contrast to Joseph Conrad's use of orality, in Faulkner the persuasive rhetoric of oratory serves as the medium that brings renewed narrative authority to the literary voices in the recovery of the values of the South that appear in the novel. As the ways of telling are being empowered by oratory, and persuasion unfolds as the chief element in the transmission of contents, the oratorical voice becomes a modulation of the narrative voice able to restore to the subjective oral voices the capacity to convince. However, the paradox encountered in *Lord Jim* of writing the spoken word remains. This is the reason for which we can assert that the oratorical voice in a modern fictional text that exposes the limits of knowledge and the limits of language emerges as a source of authority that is ambivalent itself but which nevertheless reconciles with more traditional voices of storytelling.<sup>276</sup>

Stephen M. Ross' study of Faulkner's inexhaustible "oratorical voice" brilliantly articulates the modern assumptions of the Southern oratory in the Mississippian writer's work, which shall give us a clue to how to read Faulkner's voices in relation to both Modern literature and the cultural context. Ross insists that we need to gather Faulkner's voices elaborated from the language of oratory as follows:

The oratorical voice . . . derives from a discursive practice—Southern oratory—recognizable outside the boundaries of any Faulkner text and identifiable as part of William Faulkner's biographical and regional heritage. . . . Our definition and examination of oratorical voice, however, must include more explicit reference to an external discourse. As a set of expressive functions by which speech is represented, the oratorical voice integrates features of a cultural discourse into the fiction; furthermore, the manner in which this form of represented speech functions expressively within the fiction bears a strong (if often ironic or parodic) relationship to expressive functions of Southern oratory.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> For revealing studies of rhetorical devices, see James A. Snead, "Litotes and Chiasmus: Cloaking Tropes in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Faulkner's Discourse* 16-24; and other structures of negation in François Pitavy, "Some Remarks on Negation and Denegation in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" and Winfried Herget, "The Poetics of Negation in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Ibid.* 25-32 and 33-37, respectively. On rhetorical devices in Faulkner in general and specifically in *The Sound and the Fury*, see John T. Matthews, "The Rhetoric of Containment in Faulkner." *Ibid.* 55-67.

<sup>277</sup> Stephen M. Ross, *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner*. Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1989, 186. See also his earlier essay, "Oratory and the

From Ross' point of view, thus, Faulkner's oratorical voice integrates remarkable features of Southern oratory, which in turn have incorporated the cultural elements present in the region. Indeed, oratory as Faulkner described it to Cowley, "was deeply embedded in the South's ideology, as a 'style,' yes, but also as a way of establishing and enforcing relationships among people, as a way of critiquing and commemorating assumed values, as a way of gaining and maintaining power" (Ross, 188). The oratory expressed the power of the community, as illustrated by Miss Rosa and Mr Compson, but also channeled in many ways by Quentin and Shreve through a forceful persuasive discourse and to a community of listeners who in general are not only acquainted with, but assume the values that the oratory reaffirms in its "self-reflexive and celebratory assumption of its own certainty, making of the enunciatory act per se a source of semantic authority" (193).

Unfortunately, since I need to be brief in relation to this captivating topic, I shall only introduce Ross' enumeration of the characteristic aspects of Faulkner's oratorical voice in order to see it from a certain distance:

In summary terms, then, the salient features of Faulkner's oratorical voice are these: an intertextual relationship to Southern oratory, especially the oratory of the generations immediately preceding and following the Civil War; a discursive cultural practice, participated in by speaker (author) and listener (reader), that celebrates (sincerely and parodically) shared communal values; a struggle (often dramatized in a persuasive narrative scene) for dominance by the speaker, who possesses and uses language as a source of authority; an amplified, ornate, and anaphoric verbal style (employed either sincerely or parodically) that moves forward without pause, that tends to overwhelm and to inhibit possible response; and the creation of evocative textual monuments that articulate rhetorical tempo and construct symmetrically closed verbal patterns. (212)

Notwithstanding, Faulkner's elaboration of *Absalom, Absalom!*'s narrative voices from within the language of Southern rhetoric, does not deprive their author of turning them into an instrument for achieving the contrary effect they pursue: the disavowal of their narrative authority. This is achieved both by the constant undercutting

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Dialogical in *Absalom, Absalom!* "Intertextuality in Faulkner". Ed. Michel Gresset and Noel Polk. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1985. 73-86.

of the rhetorical mode with the introduction of other discursive strategies, such as dialogue or listeners' disagreements, as well as the exaggeration of the oratorical voice that in its excessive use of rhetorical resources cannot help being parodied (Ross 196). The critic notes the ambivalence in the fictional treatment of Southern oratory:

For the dominant authority of the Faulknerian oratorical voice is both more problematical and more complete than that of the traditional orator. Like Southern rhetoric, Faulkner's oratorical voice gains authority from ornate language itself as a celebratory discourse practice; . . . At the same time, however, the oratorical voice is never adequate to the authority it exudes. The discursive authority of oratorical voice is persistently undercut in *Absalom, Absalom!*, either because the values it embodies are invalidated in the process of expressing them (as seen in Sutpen's case) or because the listener and reader are lead to desire the end of oratory for the sake of 'truth.' (218)

This ambivalence in the treatment of Southern oratory results in a fictional ambivalence with regards to the narrators' reliability in *Absalom, Absalom!*, displaying the complexities of our relationship with and uses of knowledge and language.

## 4. 2. The narrators: characterizing the discussion

If the coexistence of narrative voices is particularly relevant to Conrad's concern with narrative reliability in *Lord Jim*, it is much more so in *Absalom, Absalom!*, where Faulkner relies on the investment of different voices in the telling of the enigmatic Sutpen's story. This allows the writer to reflect on the nuances of the fragile credibility of discourse as a means of conveying knowledge, which he does by elaborating degrees of reliability in the narrators' accounts, allowing subjective, ideological, and purely discursive factors to pervade and shape the voices' relation to the story. Working on the same level of the diegesis, the four character-narrators produce a composite image in which, although under the direction of the frame narrator, the voices inform, overlap, contradict each other, comment, and absorb the others, blurring the lines that might apparently distinguish the accounts while telling the various maladjustments between character-narration and story, in a repetitive mode of the story of Thomas Sutpen that, although it seems to be the same story, in fact appears to

be a different one for each narrator, as Jakob Lothe has convincingly argued.<sup>278</sup> To accomplish my aim of considering Faulkner's complex textual formulation of the problem of reliability in narrative fiction, I will attend here to the peculiarities and functions of each narrative voice in the novel.

Seen through the prism of concepts elaborated by narrative theory to explain reliability in fiction, Rosa's and Quentin's voices are revealed as fallible, though to a different degree, the former being less conscious about the projection of her outraged feelings in her discourse than the latter, though both partake of the lack of sufficient information to tell the story. Mr Compson's voice resembles very much that of Marlow, since he initiates a process of persuasion in order to suggest a reading of the narrative enigma, but he stops short in comparison to Shreve since he is still respectful of the fact that there is no sufficient knowledge that would allow him to assert the truth. Unlike in *Lord Jim*, Faulkner's artifice develops a final unreliable voice, whose discourse tries to fully supplant knowledge, inviting a pretended truth to stand ambiguously in the obscure eye of the narrative enigma. If the progression of the experiments on the credibility of the voices establishes a twofold line of interpretation, the complexity of the pattern finally determines the ambivalence of the novel.

Five narrators tell the story of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!*: the frame narrator, Miss Rosa, Mr Compson, Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon. The five first chapters report the conversations to which Quentin Compson listens, and chapter six to nine take place in a cold Harvard room where Quentin and Shreve retell the story and try to piece it together. Even though all the voices absorb the rhetorical modes of Southern oratory, they are clearly distinguishable. As Donald Kartiganer observes, "[e]ach narrator . . . must tell that version of the Sutpen story which he or she needs to tell—the version that will both explain the facts and satisfy some personal desire: symbolically purge an anxiety or justify a life that is not without its frustrations and bitterness."<sup>279</sup> A distinction between them would help

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<sup>278</sup> Jakob Lothe, "Repetition and Narrative Method: Hardy, Conrad, Faulkner." *Narrative: From Malory to Motion Pictures*. Ed. Jeremy Hawthorn. London: Edward Arnold, 1985. 117-131.

<sup>279</sup> Donald M. Kartiganer, "Toward a Supreme Fiction: *Absalom, Absalom!*?" *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Richard H. Brodhead. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice

us understand the construction of this polyphonic and highly complex narrative artifice.<sup>280</sup>

### a) The frame narrator

When the reader at the outset of *Absalom, Absalom!* confidently regards the frame narrator as a conventional third person omniscient narrator that limits itself to framing a story told by the characters, she or he makes the first mistake.

Inside the kernel of an overnarrator who has not been privileged to render a large part of the narrative such as *Lord Jim's* frame narrator is, lies the mysterious control of an anonymous storyteller who seems to know many details but who simultaneously plays the game of confusing the reader with apparently ironic assertions, like his idiosyncratic *leitmotif* “probably true enough.” Indeed, as Hugh Ruppersburg remarks, “he is also not omniscient—at least he does not exercise omniscience, often speaking in a conditional, speculative manner suggesting his uncertainty about, or unwillingness to divulge, the truth.”<sup>281</sup> Like Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson, it contributes to delivering the discourse of the town (25-6) and to describing the narrators as characters (often to deauthorize or to dramatize them), merging with them on occasion in order to confuse narrative voice, and further contributing to this effect by adopting expressions and tones that seem to belong to the character-narrators. This allows Stephen M. Ross to claim that, even though we will see that the character-narrators’ discourses are distinguishable, “all the narrators more or less ‘sound like father’—and ‘father’ names a principle of

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Hall, Inc., 1983, 155. Originally published in *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1979.

<sup>280</sup> In this chapter I treat voice understood as “narrative voice,” yet there are other approaches to voice, “as the evocation, both literally and metaphorically, of this quintessential human characteristic.” This is Michel Gresset’s approach in “Faulkner’s Voice.” *Faulkner’s Discourse* 184-194; see also, in between these two perspectives, Albert J. Guerard’s excellent introduction, “The Faulknerian Voice.” *The Maker and the Myth* 25-42; for a general analysis of point of view in Faulkner see Warren Beck, *Faulkner: Essays*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1976.

<sup>281</sup> Hugh M. Ruppersburg, *Voice and Eye in Faulkner's Fiction*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1983, 95.

authority greater, of course than Mr Compson. An Overvoice envelops the discourse, taking up into itself all subsidiary voices.”<sup>282</sup>

The frame narrator also gives the narrative a more transcendent tone, focusing on physical impressions that work to “visualize” the scenes (Ruppersburg 96), which free the readers’ minds of the narrators’ efforts at rationalization, and use lyricism to involve them emotionally, in a similar way that lyric statements work in Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim*.

The frame narrator’s activity not only gradually increases as the novel develops but it becomes much more interventionist in the narrators’ narratives, above all in Shreve’s, which is the object of several commentaries. This frame narrator’s comments work to warn the reader about Shreve’s unreliable narration, as we shall see below.

Even though the frame narrator is progressively more relevant in its interventions, paradoxically the framing function dissipates and the expected closure of the narrative frame does not occur, in a strategy that mirrors the closure of *Lord Jim*. This is a common effect in Faulkner explored by John Matthews, which has led him to conclude that

The frame promises to be the site of fuller comprehension and the point of contact between the plights of the individual characters and the historical realities that condition the narrative. But the frame also becomes a site of stress at which the frame narrator works to cover over the very insight the story has put him in a position to grasp. The frame labors to re-cognize and to resist comprehension at the same time, in the same gesture. In Faulkner’s texts, the frame often forecloses precisely what it promises to open.<sup>283</sup>

In this sense, this narrator greatly contributes to the novel’s ambivalence over how the ending should be interpreted.

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<sup>282</sup> Stephen M. Ross, “The Evocation of Voice in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Essays in Literature* 8.2 (Fall 1981): 143.

<sup>283</sup> John T. Matthews, “Faulkner’s Narrative Frames.” *Faulkner and the Craft of Fiction* 74. This excellent article explores Quentin’s voice as frame narrator of the short stories “That Evening Sun,” “A Justice,” and “Lion”.

## b) Rosa Coldfield

Rosa Coldfield is the first storyteller to present Sutpen's story. Her narrative covers a great part of chapter 1, told directly for the most part yet sometimes filtered through Quentin's thoughts presented in italics; and the whole of chapter V in what has been labeled by Ruppensburg "translated narrative," which complicates even more the analysis of her voice. The critic believes that "in contrast to simple character narratives, translated narratives do not always reflect the narrator's speaking voice, implying instead an external narrator's presence. Such narrative evokes the speaking character's personality, environment, sensibility, weakness and strength. . . . In fact, chapter 5 presents a fusion of what Miss Rosa says with what Quentin thinks and feels as he listens to her" (86).<sup>284</sup> Briefly, chapter 1 introduces the narrative situation in which Rosa Colfield begins telling Quentin Compson the story of her brother-in-law Thomas Sutpen, because, as Quentin thinks, "she wants it told" in the future. She introduces the enigmas, alludes to the Southern context in general, and introduces Sutpen, Ellen and their children, Judith and Henry. In chapter V, Rosa Colfield—or "Miss Rosa" as Mr Compson calls her—describes the day Charles Bon was killed and the subsequent War years when Judith, Clytie, herself and Wash Jones took care of Sutpen's Hundred, and finally explains how Sutpen came back and caused her an "unbearable outrage" (140) by proposing a conditioned marriage.

Rosa's voice is deep and very ornate, profoundly rooted in the Southern oratorical figures and schemes that Stephen M. Ross describes in *Faulkner's Inexhaustible Voice* (mainly, the *anaphora*, the *expeditio*, the *antagogos*, 200-3). She involves her audiences (Quentin and us) in an intensely felt atmosphere that features senses and remembering as guidelines and texture of her narration. Her narrative does not aim at understanding either Sutpen's story or even hers, but rather at recalling it in a way that would not distance her tale from her deplorable and painful experience, and thus rather expresses it out of an emotional need. This living act of remembrance conceives the recollection of the past not so much as a linguistic performance but as sensorial experience because

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<sup>284</sup> The medium of Rosa's voice in italics throughout the whole chapter and without quotations marks that indicate a spoken discourse has been frequently discussed. See for example, Robert Dale Parker 62-4.

*That is the substance of remembering—sense, sight, smell: the muscles with which we see and hear and feel—not mind, not thought: there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no more, no less: and its resultant sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of dream. . . . Ay, grief goes, fades; we know that—but ask the tear ducts if they have forgotten how to weep. (118)*

Her profoundly sensorial discourse is concerned with touch, sight, and emotions provoked by felt experiences such as the weight of Charles Bon's coffin, the touch of Clytie's flesh, or the door barring her entrance to Judith's bedroom. Since her tale narrates her personal experience, her language is highly subjective and connoted, affected by both a female and rather traditional admiration, as well as personal outrage. She is at the center of the story of the harm done by Sutpen to her family, and so everything is told depending on how this has affected her isolated and wasted life; "as participant she is the one least capable of selecting and organizing what has happened to her, the one most subject to the feelings and memories rather than the thoughts which might grow out of the story of Sutpen" (Reed 161). Yet at the same time, hers has the value of a first-hand account of that story.

Despite being intensely personal, Rosa Coldfield's narrative powerfully engages the historical and social views of the community of Jefferson. Aware of this, she tells Quentin that "at home could have had the company of neighbors who were at least of my own kind who had known me all my life and even longer in the sense that they thought not only as I thought but as my forbears thought" (127). The town has reared her personal voice, which reflects the collective view: her repeated storytelling prevents forgetting while simultaneously reinforcing prejudices, and thereby conforming to social and racial beliefs. The town has a voice in the storytelling through Rosa's narrative emanating from her intimate space. When she narrates her return home from Sutpen's Hundred, she constantly refers to what "they will have told you" (139) in a complaint about their misunderstanding. She is able to provide reasons for what they say, and even affirms that she forgave Sutpen for his affront, although "[t]hey will tell you different, but I did" (142). Nonetheless, Rosa assumes the town's version in order to explain her pitiable circumstances, her multiple frustrations, her intimate reasons (139-142). As with Joe Christmas in *Light in August*, the town's account becomes a source of authority because she is unable to see herself

differently.<sup>285</sup> This explains why her views on historical, social, gender, and racial discourse conform so much to the New South's creed and how, through her utterance, the communal oratorical voice finds a projection in the intimacy of the individual, while Rosa's fragile personal voice endows the collective discourse with authority.

Indeed, the town of Jefferson's voice operates the transition from Rosa's intimate realm to the Southern historical context. Due to her inclusion of the Civil War and the New South contexts into the narration of her experience, Rosa Coldfield's tale transcends the narrow confines of her intimacy to become applicable to many Southern gentlewomen and shopkeeper's daughters after the Civil War. Her rhetoric engages the Southern myth, since she partakes of the women's keeping of the memory of the defeat, as Miss Jenny in *Flags in the Dust* and the foundational narratives in *Requiem for a Nun* show: A lost generation of women with heroic yet truncated lives to tell.<sup>286</sup> Indeed, the enrollment in the army of the town's young men explains Rosa's sterile summer of wistaria. Likewise, the postbellum situation of the New South's carpetbaggers coming to the cities and "people—women—locked doors and windows at night and began to frighten each other with tales of negro uprisings, when the ruined, the four years' fallow and neglected land lay more idle yet while men with pistols in their pockets gathered daily at the secret meeting places in the towns" (133) both expands upon and condenses the experience of decadence and isolation of a lost generation whose many men had died and many women's lives were as dead as Rosa Coldfield's. Virtually every personal feeling has a social/historical correspondent in Rosa. For instance, the fear of a life stifled is seen in the fear of soldiers coming to Sutpen's Hundred during the Civil War.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> See the analysis of this in Gena McKinley, "Light in August: A Novel of Passing?" *Faulkner in Cultural Context*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, 1995. Ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1997. 148-65.

<sup>286</sup> Recall the narrator's words in *Requiem for a Nun*: "or rather, his mother: from her mother, or better still, to him when he himself was a child, direct from his great-aunt: the spinsters, maiden and childless out of a time when there were too many women because too many of the young men were maimed or dead: the indomitable and undefeared, maiden progenitresses of spinster and childless descendants still capable of rising up and stalking out in the middle of *Gone With The Wind*" (William Faulkner, *Novels 1942-1954*. Ed. Joseph Blotner and Noel Polk. New York: Library of America, 1994, 644); and *Flags in the Dust*. William Faulkner, *Novels 1926-1929*. Ed. Joseph Blotner and Noel Polk. New York: Library of America, 2006, 550 passim.

<sup>287</sup> Rosa has the sense of her life being cut off, as she tells Quentin: "I don't plead youth, since what creature in the South since 1861, man woman nigger or mule, had

It was winter soon and already soldiers were beginning to come back—the stragglers, not all of them tramps, ruffians, but men who had risked and lost everything, suffered beyond endurance and had returned now to a ruined land, not the same men who had marched away but transformed—and this the worst, the ultimate degradation to which war brings the spirit, the soul—into the likeness of that man who abuses from very despair and pity the beloved wife or mistress who in his absence has been raped. We were afraid. (130)

The soldiers' treatment of women finally understood through history. Likewise, Robert Dale Parker suggests a similar general comparison in which Rosa's losses can be read as historical losses felt around her, and emphasized where Southern oratory empowers her voice: "The contrast between her losses and the authority she proclaims them with makes it almost possible, amid her obscure references to things not yet explained, to overlook that she likens herself to the losers: she holds no more brief for herself than she does for them."<sup>288</sup> Through these associations, Rosa manages to provide each of her unforgivable and unforgettable pains with a comprehensible explanation that ultimately blames the defeat in the War, and thus subscribes to the Southern Myth.

This happens again when Sutpen returns from the war. Rosa's tale grows out of the demonization of Sutpen from the beginning: Sutpen, "the evil's source and head which had outlasted all its victims" (14), "(man-horse-demon)" (6), this man Rosa looked "as an ogre, some beast out of a tale to frighten children with" (131), a "villain true enough" (138), "a demon, a villain" (140), "mad, yet not so mad. Because there is a practicality to viciousness: the thief, the liar, the murderer even, has faster rules than virtue ever has; why not madness too? If he was mad, it was only his compelling dream which was insane and not his methods" (137). However, her insistence of his wickedness is softened by means of a sympathetic historical point of view. In spite of the aforementioned characterizations, Rosa Coldfield preserves admiration for the Sutpen who returns from the war. The triumvirate of women at home feel that he is absent, transformed just like the soldiers were, but "[h]e was absent only from the room, and that because he had to be elsewhere, a part of him encompassing each

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had time or opportunity not only to have been young but to have heard what being young was like from those who had" (15).

<sup>288</sup> Robert Dale Parker, *Absalom, Absalom! The Questioning of Fictions*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991, 23.

ruined field and fallen fence and crumbling wall of cabin or cotton house or crib; himself diffused and in solution held by that electric furious immobile urgency and awareness of short time and the need for haste” (133).

Earlier in her storytelling, through free indirect discourse she condones Sutpen a priori in the light of Southern history, in a passage that helps to set the mythical frame explained in the next chapter:

a young woman I say thrown into daily and hourly contact with one of these men who, despite what he might have been at one time and despite what she might have believed or even known about him, had fought for four honorable years for the soil and traditions of the land where she had been born (and the man who had done that, villain dyed though he be, would have possessed in her eyes, even if only from association with them, the stature and shape of a hero too) and now he also emerging from the same holocaust in which she had suffered, with nothing to face what the future held for the South but his bare hands and the sword which he at least had never surrendered and the citation for valor from his defeated Commander-in-Chief. Oh he was brave (15)

Rosa Coldfield’s narrative, thus, sets the tone of the novel by introducing the Southern oratory in order to pass on her personal story, and thereby also bringing in the nostalgic Southern recollection of the Lost Cause, the consequences of which she still suffers. Furthermore, her stifled personal life parallels the Southern Lost Cause as well as her discourse parallels that of the South, as Morris suggests:

Her defense of herself is turned by Faulkner into a representation of a social failure, of defeat and fatalism. Her appropriation of Sutpen for her personal defense reverts to Faulkner’s appropriation of Rosa as a symbol of the mind of the modern South which obsessively preserves within its self-conception its self-condemnation. (185)

Finally, although Rosa aims at remembering rather than at explaining, her tale nevertheless plants the seed of the enigma, without intending to decipher it (14). Her narration sets a tone of remembrance for the whole, starting in the first chapter and taking it up once again in the fifth, including the emotive implications of it, the frame of the Southern myth, and finally referring to the mysteries of Sutpen’s story,

thus setting in motion the recurring pattern of the search for a solution.

### c) Mr Compson

Mr Compson's narrative is probably the most extensive one, covering chapters II, III and IV in their entirety, as well as a great part of chapter VI as filtered by Quentin. His voice performs the transition from a witnessed or told story to an imagined one, made of a combination of information and conjecture. In his desire to understand and find reasons for the gaps, his voice develops into a highly persuasive narrative voice which, like Marlow's, still retains the enigma.

In general terms Mr Compson explains Sutpen's arrival and the construction of Sutpen's Hundred, continues with Ellen's marriage and early motherhood in chapter II, which in turn closes with the confrontation of Sutpen with his "negroes"—a structure parallel to chapter I. In chapter III, Mr Compson focuses on Miss Rosa and the degrading relationship between the Coldfields and the Sutpens, on Mr. Colfield's life and death and Rosa's miserable life after her father's death. Chapter IV starts with Charles Bon's letter to Judith, not read until the end of the chapter, focuses on the Sutpen children's triangular relationship (Henry-Bon-Judith) and narrates Bon and Henry's visit to New Orleans, the visits to Sutpen's Hundred, and the war years. Finally, in chapter VI, Mr Compson tells Quentin the story of the Sutpen family graveyard. He tells Judith's life after the war, the visit of the octoroon and Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, and the latter's return to Jefferson.

There is a clear progression in Mr Compson's narrative from a fairly reliable voice to a voice of persuasion, clearly discernible through chapters II, III and IV. If we were to characterize his narrative in general, we could describe it as revealingly educated, deeply committed to a psychological perspective of the characters, intensely concerned with aesthetics, and not satisfied with merely what is known but willing to conjecture about the possible reasons behind the actions, fond of providing the tale with what seems to be unknown detail.

Mr Compson relies on several factors that bestow authority on his voice: he is part of the community and gives voice to its collective

knowledge, yet he provides the reader with a more distant and critical point of view of its beliefs, such as when he comments on the fact that they ignore that the language spoken by Sutpen's slaves is not an "uncivilized" one but *créole*. This is reinforced by his very elaborate and sophisticated language, adorned with comparisons that proudly exhibit the marks of an educated man, as when he draws similes with Lothario (85), Don Juan (89), Wilde (160), Beardsley (160), Cassandra (50), the French Revolution (93), or a Roman holiday (47).

His voice channels, albeit critically, what the town thought and witnessed, thus providing firsthand information. Mr Compson's voicing of Jefferson as a community is extremely intense in chapters II and III, following the frame narrator's first description of Sutpen's arrival. Following the frame narrator's perspective, "Because the town now believed that it knew him. For two years it had watched him . . ." (34), Mr Compson continues: "The town should have been accustomed to that by now. . . . I think that the affront was born of the town's realization that he was getting it involved with himself; that whatever the felony which produced the mahogany and crystal, he was forcing the town to compound it" (35); and further along, in a characteristic instance of his telling that works as an example of its effect: "They waited for him again . . . But they did not know this . . . They took him back to town . . ." (38); or "She heard just what the town heard . . . they came again and now the town listened . . . nobody knew that . . . and so the tale came through the negroes . . . though, the town believed . . . Nobody knows what she thought. The town believed that Henry's action . . . They would be seen together in the carriage in town now and then . . . because the town knew . . . That's all Miss Rosa knew. She could have known no more about it than the town knew . . ." (64-5).

In addition to providing a collective view that strengthens the relationship between the individual stories and the collective ones, this perspective endows the narrative with a strong sense of awareness about the origin of the information. This is reinforced by the repeated image of the town watching, as when Ellen and Thomas Sutpen get engaged: "and others who did not happen to have horses at the moment joining in and following the committee in the road, and ladies and children and women slaves coming to the doors and windows of the homes as they passed to watch as they went on in grim tableau,"

“Sutpen had a larger following than if he actually had been the runaway slave” (38).<sup>289</sup>

Likewise, the rigorous veracity of the information is emphasized by Mr Compson’s constant references to his very privileged source of first-hand information, his father General Compson—Quentin’s “grandfather.” The text is brimming with phrases like “your grandfather said” (37, 38, 39, 165), “your grandfather saw . . . your grandfather attended to” (160, 159), “your grandfather did not know” (165), “So he (your grandfather) believed that” or similar expressions as “I have this from something your grandfather let drop one day and which he doubtless had from Sutpen himself” (40) or “only your grandfather to couple at last the boy, the youth, with the child . . . — your grandfather to whose office Judith came that afternoon five years later and he could not remember when he had seen her in Jefferson before” (167). Since Grandfather is virtually Sutpen’s only friend, Mr Compson owns privileged information that allows him to complete and correct the town’s version of the story: “and no one but your grandfather and perhaps Clytie ever to know that Sutpen had gone to New Orleans too” (57).

If the factual story of the Sutpen family in Jefferson and their relation to the town and its people relies on the information of witnesses, which is the basis of chapter II and part of chapter III, Mr Compson’s accounts of Bon’s meeting at the University, and Henry’s visit to New Orleans cannot rely on direct testimony, and are thus founded upon probability and imagination. Furthermore, Mr Compson’s preoccupation with the psychological aspect of the story substitutes a witness testimony with a subjective one that is not based on the characters’ conversations with friends but on pure conjecture. This has led Albert Guerard to fully explore what he labels the “narration by conjecture.”<sup>290</sup> This perspective of the story grows in importance with

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<sup>289</sup> The intensity of the looks also effectively works related to the town in *Light in August*. See especially, Christopher A. Londe, *William Faulkner and the Rites of Passage*. Macon: Mercer UP, 1996.

<sup>290</sup> See Guerard’s brilliant *The Triumph of the Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976. Lothar Hönnighausen observes the interesting association of the narration by conjecture and the function of metaphor in the novel: “The close interrelationship between metaphor and narration does not simply derive from the fact that the style of *Absalom, Absalom!* is richer in metaphors than that of *Vanity Fair* or *Gone with the Wind*. Rather, it lies in an essential affinity between the hypothetical or conjectural nature of the narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!* and the structure of the metaphor. As

Mr Compson's tale, and reaches its highest point when focused on the thoughts of the Sutpen children and Charles Bon.

In his cautious treatment of the information, Mr Compson begins introducing the language of probability through the suggestion of a range of possibilities that explain either certain details or the very motives for the action: "and those eyes [Sutpen's] hard and pale and reckless and probably quizzical and maybe contemptuous even then" (36); "He may have believed that your grandfather or Judge Benbow might have done it a little more effortlessly than he" (37); "and perhaps a half dozen more . . . or perhaps to be close and so miss nothing . . . Perhaps she was still moving beneath that pride which would not allow the people inside the church to see her weep. . . She just walked into it, probably hurrying toward the seclusion of the carriage . . . perhaps her first intimation was the voice shouting . . . or perhaps the changing light itself" (46). Compared to Shreve, this is still a moderate level of speculation, but it gradually tilts toward imagination as the narrative progresses (see 49, 51, 54).<sup>291</sup>

Chapter IV champions imagination as the main source of conjecture, in its focus on Henry, Bon and Judith's relationship. As Mr Compson himself speculates: "So I can imagine him, the way he did it" (91), "I can imagine how he did it—the calculation, the surgeon's alertness" (92), which contributes to his initial construction of Bon as a character. This faculty is crucial in this function, since Bon "can never be reported, exposed, told (*exposé*) as substance or subject, and is not

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the narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* are always toying with several possibilities, the readers following them have also—as in metaphor—to negotiate among several interacting contexts." (*Faulkner. Masks and Metaphors*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1997, 168. Reed also analyzes this use of metaphor.)

<sup>291</sup> As the novel as a whole does rather remarkably, Mr Compson's storytelling displays the complex relationship between history and truth that Colleen E. Donnelly has explored. In her view: "Faulkner subtly reveals that his narrator has become more enlightened by virtue of the fact that he, Compson, has faced head-on the speculative nature of his endeavor. In turn for the first time the reader is made aware of the need to speculate if any accounting of Sutpen is to be obtained. . . . Imagination and belief are inextricably fused; Faulkner begins to define historical truth as that which is believed in, which has the power to explain as 'history-for.' 'History-for,' as Lévi-Strauss defines it, is an attempt to probe psychological and ideological, rational and irrational, causes and results (257) in order to explain the necessity or inevitability of events (252-53). Such a probe, Lévi-Strauss and Faulkner would agree, requires engaging the imagination." ("Compelled to Believe: Historiography and Truth in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Style* 25.1, Spring 1991, 108.)

even dissimulating or self-concealing . . . in the occult of notknowing.”<sup>292</sup> The power and importance of the imagination in delineating the characters is very strong, as we observe when Mr Compson speculates about the depth of Judith’s love for Bon: “I can imagine her if necessary even murdering the other woman. But she certainly would have made no investigation and then held a moral debate between what she wanted and what she thought was right” (100).

This imagination feeds the psychological characterization of Bon, Henry and Judith. A few examples shall suffice to illustrate this. Mr Compson speculates on Bon’s feelings on the campus: “this man handsome elegant and even catlike and too old to be where he was, too old not in years but in experience, with some tangible effluvium of knowledge, surfeit: of actions done and satiations plumbed and pleasures exhausted and even forgotten” (79), and how he felt about the Sutpen white siblings: “as if he had known all the while that the occasion would arise when he would have to wait and that all he would need to do would be to wait; that he had seduced Henry and Judith both too thoroughly to have any fear that he might not marry Judith when he wished to” (78). This not only concerns Bon, the constructed character analyzed in our chapter on racial representation, but also Henry:

Yes, he loved Bon, who seduced him as surely as he seduced Judith—the country boy born and bred who, with the five or six others of that small undergraduate body composed of other planters’ sons whom Bon permitted to become intimate with him, who aped his clothing and manner and (to the extent which they were able) his very manner of living, looked upon Bon as though he were a hero out of some adolescent Arabian Nights who had stumbled upon (or rather, had thrust upon him) a talisman or touchstone . . . In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister’s virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would be despoiled, choose for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride. Perhaps that is what went on, not in Henry’s mind but in his soul.

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<sup>292</sup> Ralph Flores, *The Rhetoric of Doubtful Authority: Deconstructive Readings of self-questioning narratives, St. Augustine to Faulkner*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1984, 161.

Because he never thought. He felt, and acted immediately. He knew loyalty and acted it, he knew pride and jealousy; he loved, grieved and killed, still grieving and, I believe, still loving Bon, the man to whom he gave four years of probation, four years in which to renounce and dissolve the other marriage, knowing that the four years of hoping and waiting would be in vain. (80)<sup>293</sup>

And later, also referring to Bon and Henry,

Who knew Henry so much better than Henry knew him, and Henry not showing either, suppressing still that first cry of terror and grief, *I will believe! I will! I will!* Yes, that brief, before Henry had had time to know what he had seen, but not slowing: now would come the instant for which Bon had builded (93)

The introduction of direct thoughts (given in italics) and real words marks a step forward that almost reaches the realm of unreliability in a similar way to Marlow's interpretation of Jim's thoughts. As Ruppensburg notes in his observations on chapter II:

Because Mr Compson talks about Rosa from what he believes to have been her perspective, she serves as his focal character. He also intrudes occasionally into the minds of other characters, such as Ellen and Sutpen. Relying on some facts and considerable theorizing, he assumes the role of an omniscient narrator producing internal narrative. To his credit, he does not camouflage his theories. He probably believes they are good ones, that he can judge character astutely. As a result, he reports thought and dialogue, analyzes character motivations, and draws conclusions quite persuasively. Yet his very persuasiveness, in the novel's overall context, identifies him as fallible source of fundamentally unreliable narrative. (111)

This occurs most frequently in chapter IV, in a clear evolution of the persuasiveness that Mr Compson is engaged in. Especially remarkable are Bon and Henry's thoughts and words, part of what Leona Toker calls "paraleptic material" (in opposition to "empirical material"), that is "scenes that the focal character did not witness and is, therefore, not competent to present in a dramatic manner." As this critic reminds us,

*Absalom, Absalom!* constantly flouts the convention according to which a first-person narrator should not "show" the scenes he or she has not observed but summarize them, making due reference to the source of

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<sup>293</sup> See other psychological characterizations in 78, 88, 75, 81, 93, 95.

information. Here all the focal characters rebel against the limitations of their angle of vision and assume the very prerogatives of omniscience that the third-person narrator takes great pains to disclaim.<sup>294</sup>

This effect is notable in Mr Compson's narrative, and will be exaggerated in Shreve's. In the former, Henry is supposed to have said to Bon on their way to New Orleans: "*I will believe! I will! I will! Whether it is true or not, I will believe!*" (92) to which Bon allegedly replies, "perhaps even the gambler now thinking *Have I won or lost?*" (95), also supposedly adding, when they get to the octoroon's house:

"The customary way is to stand back to back, the pistol in your right hand and the corner of the other cloak in your left. Then at the signal you begin to walk and when you feel the cloak tauten you turn and fire. Though there are some now and then, when the blood is especially hot or when it is still pleasant blood, who prefer knives and one cloak. They face one another inside the same cloak, you see, each holding the other's wrist with the left hand. But that was never my way';—causal, chatty, you see, waiting for the countryman's slow question, who knew already now before he asked it: 'What would you be fighting for?' (93)

And these are Judith's thoughts in Mr Compson's narrative:

But true pride which can say to itself without abasement *I love, I will accept no substitute; something has happened between him and my father; if my father was right, I will never see him again, if wrong he will come or send for me; if happy I can be I will, if suffer I must I can.* (100)<sup>295</sup>

Not only are these textual signals of Mr Compson's questionable reliability but they also contribute to his character portrayal, as Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan observes:

The dissociation between narrating subject and narrated object takes two complementary forms in *Absalom, Absalom!* On the one hand, the subjectivity of the non-narrating characters becomes a construction by others. You are what others say about you. On the other hand, the

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<sup>294</sup> Leona Toker, *Eloquent Reticence: Withholding Information in Fictional Narrative*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1993, 163.

<sup>295</sup> See also Bon and Henry's last conversation on page 109.

narrator's access to their own subjectivity is achieved through their narration about others. You are what you say about others.<sup>296</sup>

Mr Compson's reveling in speculation even drives him to imagine what would have happened if things had occurred differently, in a passage that functions as a warning to the reader of his sense of storytelling and his sense of fiction. In this passage we also see the aforementioned psychological characterization:

Then Bon rode on to the River and took the boat. And now this: who knows, perhaps if Henry had gone with him that summer instead of waiting until the next, Bon would not have had to die as he did; if Henry had only gone then to New Orleans and found out then about the mistress and the child; Henry who, before it was too late, might have reacted to the discovery exactly as Sutpen did, as a jealous brother might have been expected to react, since who knows but what it was not the fact of the mistress and child, the possible bigamy, to which Henry gave the lie, but to the fact that it was his father who told him, his father who anticipated him, the father who is the natural enemy of any son and son-in-law who has for mortal foe the mother is the ally, just as after the wedding the father will be the ally of the actual son-in-law who has for mortal foe the mother of his wife. But Henry did not go this time. (86)

Mr Compson also feels free to judge characters and actions, in what Dorrit Cohn classifies as signals of a "discordant narrator," or a narrator whose judgments the reader has cause to suspect of being inaccurate, as we have seen. This is conducted mainly through the technique of caricature, as Ryuichi Yamaguchi has explained.<sup>297</sup> Judgment is particularly harsh when Mr Compson refers to women. For example, he explains how Ellen gathered Bon:

She spoke of Bon as if he were three inanimate objects in one or perhaps one inanimate object for which she and her family would find three concordant uses: a garment which Judith might wear as she would a riding habit or a ball gown, a piece of furniture which would complement and complete the furnishing of her house and position, and a mentor and example to correct Henry's provincial manners and speech and clothing. (61)

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<sup>296</sup> Sholomith Rimmon-Kenan, *A Glance Beyond Doubt: Narration, Representation, Subjectivity*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, c1996, 44.

<sup>297</sup> Ryuichi Yamaguchi, *Faulkner's Artistic Vision: The Bizarre and the Terrible*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2004.

He also judges acts that he cannot even know whether Rosa committed:

Nobody knows how she managed to get the material from her father's store. He didn't give it to her. He would have felt it incumbent on him to supply his granddaughter with clothes if she were indecently clad or if she were ragged or cold, but not to marry in. So I believe she stole it. She must have. She must have taken it almost from under her father's nose" (63)

Notwithstanding the signals that populate his discourse to indicate his misleading evaluations, Mr Compson is not only aware that "it just does not explain" but also that human beings are prone to misjudge when we have to fill in the gaps of someone else's story. In a revealing passage he says:

Have you noticed how so often when we try to reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief, the only possible belief, that they stemmed from some of the old virtues?" (100)

Along with narrative conjecture, imagination and the privilege of access to thoughts and words he could not have witnessed, as well as judging, Mr Compson's tendency to turn into direct assumption what had begun as pure speculation highly contributes to his persuasiveness. Indeed, "it is a narrative in which we are always passing from the postulation of how it must have been to the conviction that it really was that way," as Peter Brooks affirms.<sup>298</sup> He uses this strategy when describing Thomas Sutpen's intentions when going to New Orleans:

This father who should see that man one time, yet have reason to make a six hundred mile journey to investigate him and either discover what he already and apparently by clairvoyance suspected, or at least something which served just as well as reason for forbidding the marriage. (82)

Finally, rhetorical strategies of persuasion help to engage the reader emotionally in the development of the story and to lead the audience

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<sup>298</sup> Peter Brooks, "Incredulous Narration: *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Comparative Literature* 34.3 (Summer 1982): 255.

towards Mr Compson's personal interpretation of the inexplicable. This is apparent in rhetorical questions such as "You see?" (82), and more elaborate ones such as "Because what else could he have hoped to find in New Orleans, if not the truth, if not what his father had told him, what he had denied and refused to accept even though, despite himself, he must have already believed?" (75) or "And Judith?: how else to explain her but this way?" (99) as well as other modes of emotional implication like "—this, mind you, in a man who had already acquired a name for prowess among women" (82) or "Oh he was shrewd" (94). All the mentioned persuasive rhetorical devices belong to chapter IV.

Mr Compson's narrative thus traces the path from direct witness testimony and the town's perspective in chapters II and III, towards a voice so highly persuasive that, though aware of the lack of information and the danger of misjudgment inherent in speculation, leads the reader toward the interpretation of Charles Bon's murder as a matter of bigamy. He contributes to freeing the story from Rosa Coldfield's personal experience not only to recount the sequence of events but also to find out the why of it. He partially achieves this by animating the characters through an exploration of the psychological reasons behind their behavior. He thus opens the story up to the broadest possible community of interests, at the same time that he progressively focuses on the inner self of the characters. Although his perspective is highly concerned with love and the sexual aspects of the story, which produce a rigidly gendered reading, he introduces the issue of race unreflectively through the character of the octoroon, and reflectively through the character of Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon. His process of persuasion thus functions to plow the land that Shreve would later seed with new inventions, by taking Mr Compson's narration by conjecture much further, deep into what is clearly distinguished as the terrain of unreliability. His voice, however, precariously inhabits a place where he "dramatizes, for himself and for Quentin, the necessary play between the loss of absolute meaning and the power of the mind to create its own."<sup>299</sup> His is, like Marlow's, a voice of persuasion. Mr Compson's narrative discourse, therefore, subtly modifies the reader's disposition toward receiving Shreve's both much more grown up Bon, and his designation of the issue of miscegenation as the key information for solving the narrative enigma.

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<sup>299</sup> John T. Matthews, *The Play of Faulkner's Language*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1982, 141.

#### d) Quentin Compson

Although Quentin Compson only fully narrates chapter VII, his role is fundamental in the novel, as Hugh Ruppersburg has demonstrated:

Because his thoughts and reactions are repeatedly emphasized and each of the narratives is channeled through his mind, because he ultimately receives all the information about Thomas Sutpen, Quentin is the focal character in the novel—a sustained interval narrative from his perspective” (88)

Indeed, Quentin acts as a container and reteller of the whole story of the Sutpens, including both the known and the speculative fragments, thus aiding the process of reproduction and perpetuation of the stories that belong to the Southern community of Jefferson. He is certainly aware of this merging of voices, information, and its repetition, and actively tries but fails to resist his role in it:

*Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let his second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm. (216)*

We shall pay attention to both Quentin's voice and Quentin's silences to understand his ambivalent attitude towards the story and its retelling. To begin with, Quentin's voice incorporates many of the expressions he has already heard from Rosa Colfield and his father, such as “wild niggers” (181-2) or the designation of the slave at the door of the Virginian Plantation with the expression “monkey nigger” (190, 192). However, the tone of his voice and his own language are less prone to eloquent and decorous comparisons, at least those that incorporate a great deal of judgment like those pronounced by Mr Compson. Nor does it resemble Rosa Coldfield's resentful perspective. In fact, although profoundly emotional, Quentin's narrative in chapter VII exudes an unmistakable aura of rigor in the delivery of his account. He produces this effect by his insistent naming of his sources of information, mainly Father and Grandfather, whom he continuously reports in this chapter. Quentin uses his

Grandfather's account of his meeting with Sutpen during the "hunting" of the French architect, which is valuable first-hand information, since Sutpen had told the latter his past from childhood to his arrival in Jefferson, as well as many of his perceptions and plans (his 'design') on two occasions, one at the time of the "hunt" and another one in his office during the war. On the other hand, Quentin narrates Sutpen's story after the war and his murder by Wash Jones based on Father's account of it.

Quentin's discourse is marked by impressively consistent reported speech that leaves little room for his own opinion and impressions, although the same cannot be said for repressions, as Richard C. Moreland has argued.<sup>300</sup> The former, thus, are much more manifest in what Moreland qualifies as "ironic" silences, as well as the frame narrator's reflections or filtered indirect speech, than in Quentin's 'voice' proper. The effect of the reported speech is often intense, as in the following instances: "and told Grandfather . . . just told Grandfather how he had put his first wife aside . . . telling Grandfather in that same tone while they sat on the log waiting for the niggers to come back with the other guests and the whiskey: 'So I went to the West Indies. . . . a Scottish woman who, so he told Grandfather, never did quite learn to speak English. . . . Sent to school, 'where,' he told Grandfather, 'I learned little'" (199) or "because at that time, Grandfather said, . . . or at least, Grandfather said, he did not appear to intend to resume. . . . That was how Grandfather remembered it" (202). And Mr Compson's reported speech: "and Father said how for that moment Wash's heart would be quiet . . . the actual world was the one where his own apotheosis (Father said) galloped on the black thoroughbred, thinking maybe, Father said. . . . But Father said how . . . Father said maybe he realized all of a sudden . . ." (233); and "He chose the name himself, Grandfather believed, just as he named them all—the Charles Goods and the Clytemnestras and Henry and Judith and all of them—that entire fecundity of dragon's teeth as Father called it. And Father said—" (220).<sup>301</sup>

Consistent with his rigorous reporting, Quentin points out the information gaps in the story. Remarks such as "[a]nd he [Sutpen]

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<sup>300</sup> Richard C. Moreland, *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990.

<sup>301</sup> See also for Grandfather's reported speech: 188, 200, 208; and for Father's: 236-7, 238, 239.

never told whether the voyage was hard or not” (202), or when he says that Sutpen himself “didn’t know, or remember, whether he had ever heard, been told, the reason or not. All he remembered was that” (185), “he not telling how he got there, what had happened during the six years between that day when he, a boy of fourteen who knew no tongue but English and not much of that, had decided to go to the West Indies” (204), are common. Likewise, it is also easy to recognize his concern for accuracy: “(you couldn’t call it period because as he remembered it or as he told Grandfather he did, it didn’t have either a definite beginning or a definite ending” (186) or when he corrects Shreve’s lack of precision in referring to Miss Rosa as “Aunt Rosa” (146), or confusing Gettysburg with Manassas (297).

Quentin’s conformation to the sections of the story that simply do not explain is also reflected in the fact that he does not employ the language of probability his father had used to explore the unknown psychological motives behind the characters’ behavior. The scattered conjectures are the less risky and are reported as part of Mr Compson’s account (see for example, 237 or 239). However, Quentin does include a certain amount of the character’s thoughts and words, but they are either heard by Grandfather: “Because he [Sutpen] said how the terrible part of it had not occurred to him yet, he just lay there while the two of them argued inside of him, speaking in orderly turn, both calm, even leaning backward to be calm and reasonable and unrancorous: *But I can kill him. —No. That wouldn’t do no good —Then what shall we do about it? —I dont know.*” (196), or Sutpen’s direct words “Sent to school, ‘where,’ he told Grandfather, ‘I [Sutpen] learned little save that most of the deeds, good and bad both” (200); or, once again part of Mr Compson’s speculations, as Quentin is careful to mention every time:

Which was true, only Father said there was a kind of pride in it: that he had never tried to enter the house, even though he believed that if he had tried, Sutpen would not have let them repulse him; like (Father said) he might have said to himself *The reason I wont try it aint that I refuse to give any black nigger the chance to tell me I cant but because I aint going to force Mister Tom to have cuss a nigger or take a cussing from his wife on my account* (232)

This does not mean that Quentin agrees with everything that is said. As a matter of fact, he disagrees with the former tellers on at least two main points: 1. He disagrees that Sutpen shall be taken for a madman

instead of an innocent man, since from his point of view: “he was not mad. He insisted on that to Grandfather” (193) 2. He understands from Grandfather’s observations that Charles Bon was Thomas Sutpen’s first child and, therefore, that it was incest and not bigamy that menaced the Sutpen’s saga, in clear disagreement with Mr Compson, who was not aware of that important piece of information until his son told him (220).

Quentin’s concern with incest should probably be considered in the light of his relationship with Caddy in *The Sound and the Fury*, because it clarifies why he cannot overcome the episode of Judith barring the bedroom’s door when Bon has been killed, as narrated by Rosa (145), as well as it explains his subsequent fixation on Henry’s struggle to surmount incest as a barrier to Bon and Judith’s relationship.<sup>302</sup>

In referring to Sutpen, Quentin insists much more than the other narrators that “[h]is trouble was innocence,” that “he had not only not lost the innocence yet, he had not yet discovered that he possessed it” (189), “because he was still innocent” (190), because “He couldn’t even realise yet that his trouble, his impediment, was innocence because he would not be able to realise that until he got it straight” (193). As Claudia Brodsky comments,

it is Quentin who reinterprets this idea of innocence as a means of understanding Sutpen’s incredulous reaction, and consequently, his future evolution into the object of Rosa’s outrage. Now seen through Quentin’s eyes, which have looked, in turn, through his grandfather’s, the ‘demon’ seems more like a fallen angel who never lost his ‘innocence’ in hell<sup>303</sup>

Thereby, he does not only offer a shifting point of view on the demonized Sutpen, but he is making it possible to consider Sutpen’s innocence as reaching beyond the individual story to participate of the whole problem faced by the South as region. Quentin’s capacity not

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<sup>302</sup> See the already classical psychoanalytical study in Faulkner, John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/ Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1975; see also from this perspective but focusing on the figure of the father, Doreen Fowler, *Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed*. Charlottesville and London: UP of Virginia, 1997; see also the excellent study by Noel Polk, *Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1996.

<sup>303</sup> Claudia Brodsky, “The Working Narrative in *Absalom, Absalom!*: A Textual Analysis.” *Amirkastudien/ American Studies* 23.2 (1978): 244.

only to feel but to reflect on the individual manifestations of the Southern curse is demonstrated in the way he perceives Sutpen's innocence as pertaining to the regional character: "the innocence, not the man, the tradition" (193). And thus, as I will argue below, he subscribes to one of the foremost motifs of the nostalgic view over the Old South.<sup>304</sup>

Quentin's awareness of the burden of Southern history—as shown in his complicated relationship with the Myth of the South, which holds him in its thrall—concerns his storytelling because it endows his voice with the "almost sullen flat tone which had caused Shreve to watch him from the beginning with intent detached speculation and curiosity" (211). Indeed, because to Quentin the whipped South would lead to a situation in which "there wouldn't be anything left that mattered that much, worth getting that heated over, worth protesting against or suffering for or dying for or even living for" (223). The History of the South, hence, condemned those who were living it and were reared in it to feel as Quentin felt that "*I have heard too much, I have been told too much; I have had to listen to too much, too long*" (172). They are the recipients of the stories, "those who should outlive the fighting and so participate in the remorse" (215).<sup>305</sup>

For Quentin, thus, his act of resistance to having to listen all over again is not to listen anymore, and not telling much—less every time in the novel when he has the opportunity to, as if his was an increasingly "flat, curiously dead voice" (213).<sup>306</sup> As Judith Lockyer

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<sup>304</sup> John E. Bassett also identifies these two motifs as part of Quentin's subjective interpretation: "The common sexual image of the door fuses an exploration of a dominant Southern myth and fear with Quentin's incestuous fantasies. But the fusion is the product of Quentin's own mind; it is he who tells the story of Sutpen and Wash unable to enter doors. The point is not that Sutpen was never turned away from the plantation door by a slave, but that the image controls Quentin's narrative as much as the pattern of lost innocence does. Both are central to Quentin's own identity, and both control his narrative of the experience he communicates." (John E. Bassett, *Vision and Revisions: Essays on Faulkner*. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1989, 138.) For a general interpretation of Quentin's feelings as the narrative passes on, see M. E. Bradford.

<sup>305</sup> Ilse Dusoir Lind relates the tragedy of the South to the classic moral tragedy through the development of the character-narrators' styles in "Design and Meaning of *Absalom, Absalom!*" *William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism*. Ed. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery. Michigan: Michigan State UP, 1960. 278-304.

<sup>306</sup> Again, as in note 251, Quentin is a living example of the importance Faulkner gives to silence. We should recall here Faulkner's vibrating response to Jean Stein in

believes, “Quentin is a reluctant listener to other’s narratives because he knows their power to ensnare, even to engulf him.”<sup>307</sup> Similarly, Moreland suggests that “[h]e recognizes, then, and grows increasingly impatient, throughout this chapter with his father’s, Shreve’s, and his own cultural, historical, habitual forced irony and its increasingly obvious, sometimes violent denials of kinship with those innocent objects to which it opposes itself in impotent contradiction” (95). The power of the narrators’ language is even greater insofar as it absorbs the rhetoric of Southern oratory. This traps Quentin’s reaction in the ambivalence of all the contradictions inherent in the Southern society, and condensed in Sutpen’s story: he resists the urge to listen and to speak, yet he cannot help doing either. Moreover, his silence might be taken as a sign of rhetorical effectiveness. This effect can be read following Ross’ understanding of oratorical monumentality:

Oratory is monumental in that it does not initiate an interpretative process. Oratory answers no questions, for all its questions are rhetorical ones; it reveals no secrets, but rather invokes and confirms ideals, opinion, emotions. Orations are verbal constructs that are not, for the most part, meant to be understood so much as experienced. It is in Faulkner’s oratorical voice, I would suggest, as much as in the narrative complexity of his plots, that we find his texts’ resistance to the hermeneutic enterprise. (209)

This will explain how in Faulkner’s narrative oratory, “the speaker dominates rhetorically and verbally” (195), and the listener or reader does not usually “break free of imprisoning conventions” (209). That is why

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the interview that appeared in *The Paris Review* on 1956: “I would say that music is the easiest means in which to express, since it came first in man’s experience and history. But since words are my talent I must try to express clumsily in words what the pure music would have done better. That is, music would express better and simpler, but I prefer to use words as I prefer to read rather than listen. I prefer silence to sound, and the image produced by words occurs in silence. That is, the thunder and the music of the prose take place in silence.” *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-1962*. Ed. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1968, 248.

<sup>307</sup> Judith Lockyer, *Ordered by Words: Language and Narration in the Novels of William Faulkner*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1991, 41. The author makes a comparison of Quentin’s speech in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*.

some of Faulkner's most thoughtful characters—Quentin Compson, Ike McCaslin, Gail Hightower—even as they read or listen to and try to interpret some discourse, remain in exile outside interpretation's boundaries, barred from understanding and sometimes from revivification. In *Absalom, Absalom!* Quentin is inertly stuck in present meditation before verbal relics that he cannot read through into the past. (209)

His is a voice of exile, the voice that is silent at the same time that it is the one that understands the most, but is so trapped that it cannot find a response.<sup>308</sup>

Overall, in his striving for objectivity with regards to the information reported in his narrative, Quentin's voice represents a contrast to both Mr Compson's and Shreve's narratives. Simultaneously, however, he takes up Mr Compson's openness to a wider context, which is not so much nurtured by the town's witness and gossip as by local historical knowledge (references to the Civil War, to the postbellum period, to social classes such as the poor whites, or to the South as a region), which is made effective by his seeing in Sutpen's story some of the principal regional problems. This opens the door above all to a much more complex understanding of the white planter, but also of the intricate class hierarchy that is superimposed on other hierarchies, such as the one based on racial differences. Quentin's is both a language of subscription and a language of rejection, yet always exhibiting a serious personal commitment to Southern history. Quentin's narrative, thus, works to introduce Shreve's general view on the South and the particular historical problem of miscegenation that haunts it, as well as it prepares the reader to face a counterpoint in a much more playful, and definitely unreliable voice.

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<sup>308</sup> See the very suggesting analysis of Faulkner's use of silence, mainly Quentin's in *The Sound and the Fury* in Michiko Yoshida, "The Gravity of Silence in Faulkner's Language." *Faulkner's Discourse* 204-213; see also Toni Morrison's Master thesis: *Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated*. A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University for the Degree of Master of Arts by Chloe Ardellia Wofford. September, 1955. Copy available at the Firestone Library in Princeton University.

## e) Shreve McCannon

Quentin Compson's Harvard roommate, the Canadian Shreve McCannon, has so enthusiastically followed Quentin's narrative of the Sutpen's story that he is not only ready but also willing to participate in the telling. His narration is quite prolonged, covering the beginning of Chapter VI, almost all of Chapter VIII and a large part of Chapter IX. For the most part he is summarizing the accounts that Quentin had told him he had heard from Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson at the beginning of Chapter VI, he ends that chapter by alluding to the figure of Jim Bond, and he continues his story by telling Henry and Sutpen's conversation in the library, in chapter VIII. The rest of the chapter concentrates on Charles Bon's childhood and youth, the relationship between him and the Sutpens from beginning to end, the reflections on and conclusions about which are delivered in chapter IX. The narrative situation from chapter VI onward, in which the two youngsters are conversing in a cold Harvard room, can be defined as that of a second person narrative when Shreve speaks, since he recounts to Quentin the story that the latter not only owns but is a participant in. Thus, actually Shreve explains Quentin's story.

Shreve's narrative situation and his way of telling Sutpen's story render him an unreliable narrator, since readers are invited to perceive that his narration, as Wayne Booth posed it, does not speak or act "in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms.)"<sup>309</sup> This is so because, as Noel Polk points out, "we should be suspicious of the suddenness and the sufficiency with which the race card provides a solution for the boy's narrative convolutions" (*Children* 138). I have argued in detail elsewhere why Shreve's discourse should be considered as unreliable, so I will limit myself here to presenting only the most relevant evidence for this.<sup>310</sup>

As we shall see in the next chapter, Shreve has a curiosity about and a stereotyped idea of the South that clearly determines his way of narrating. Just like in his insistent demand for Quentin to define the South (145, 296), Shreve's sarcastic and detached mode of storytelling is visible in the comments denoting his mere pleasure in narrating as

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<sup>309</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. London: Penguin, 1987, 158.

<sup>310</sup> Marta Puxan, "Narrative Strategies on the Color Line: The Unreliable Narrator Shreve and Racial Ambiguity in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Mississippi Quarterly* 60.3 (Summer 2007): 529-559.

when he urges “you wait. Let me play a while now” (231) or when he establishes a parallelism with dramatic performances: “That was all he was after. Jesus, the South is fine, isn’t it. It’s better than the theatre, isn’t it. It’s better than Ben Hur, isn’t it?” (180). This gives him a freedom in narrating that does not aim at pursuing the truth of the story, in contrast to the extreme care taken by Quentin to provide the sources of his information in order to reassemble it correctly. Conversely, Shreve believes that plausibility is more important than the mere reporting of true facts, as he tells Quentin:

Because why not? Because listen. What was it the old dame, the Aunt Rosa, told you about how there are some things that just have to be whether they are or not, have to be a damn sight more than some other things that maybe are and it don’t matter a damn whether they are or not?” (266)

Verisimilitude implies the highest consciousness of fictional narrative, and thus Shreve’s story is perfectly shaped to fulfill his aim of solving the story on a racial basis rather than a familial one.

What Shreve does is to establish an order of events that persuades his audience that Henry’s motive for killing Bon was miscegenation rather than incest. This is already suggested in the first pages of his own narrative when, by narrating Henry and Bon’s conversation in the library, Shreve invents that Sutpen already tells Henry that Bon is his son, and thus that Judith and Bon cannot get married. Since incest is now the first motive in the two conversations between Father and son, Shreve can assume that in the second one during the war Sutpen tells Henry that Charles Bon has a drop of black blood in his veins, and so this “black son of a bitch”’s (295) defiance would result in miscegenation.

Following this episode, Shreve constructs Charles Bon’s character and very significantly puts him at the center of his narrative, turning him in the centripetal keystone of his account.<sup>311</sup> Indeed, as Terrence Doody

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<sup>311</sup> In narratology, we should read Shreve’s movement of Bon at the center of the narrative as a “focus,” as F. K. Stanzel understands it in his major study *A theory of narrative*: “the concept of ‘focus’ has to be introduced. . . . The focusing of a part of the represented reality directs the reader’s attention to the thematically most important element of the narrative or of a part of the narrative. Therefore focusing can be defined as the foregrounding of a certain thematic aspect by means of narrative perspective. . . . The episodic prominence of a minor character in a scene is

notes, “Shreve’s active role not only supports Quentin and confirms his effort to understand Sutpen and himself, it also gives to Charles Bon a place and an identity Bon never has in his own life. Shreve begins as something of Bon’s counterpart and ends as Bon’s apologist—as the only voice Bon has, in fact.”<sup>312</sup>

Shreve continues Mr Compson’s narrative of conjecture but—unlike Quentin’s father—he does not have an experiential basis for it, but directly invents the character. For example, as John Basset remarks, “*he*, not Quentin, articulates the search for the father that seems to underlie Bon’s behavior, or rather he imposes upon that behavior a pattern of the search for the father”(139). As it will be analyzed further along, Shreve’s creation of Bon introduces many of the racial stereotypes that shall prepare the reader to accept as a likely possibility the fact that Bon was a “Negro,” a fact that is left unresolved and undocumented. Finally, Shreve’s focus on Jim Bond will allow him to extract the inferences of a degeneration and downfall provoked by miscegenation.<sup>313</sup> Thus, as Ruppensburg observes, Shreve “completes the chain of transmission, the final link who gathers all the evidence together in an attempt at a definite account of what happened. Indeed, Shreve assumes this summarizing role willingly. Quentin hazards no conclusions, perhaps because the various incarnations of the story have confronted him with the painful knowledge that the real truth can never be uncovered” (91).

Along with the self-conscious ordering of events and activation of racial stereotypes in the narrative that will lead to his personal resolution of the narrative enigma, Shreve’s overuse of the language of probability produces the opposite effect of assertion in the narrative:

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a kind of focus. . . . This kind of focusing is often used to regulate the reader’s sympathies in regard to the characters.” (1979. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984, 114).

<sup>312</sup> Terrence Doody, “Quentin and Shreve, Sutpen and Bon.” *Confession and Community in the Novel*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1980, 166.

<sup>313</sup> David Paul Ragan notices one of the purposes of Shreve’s ordering of events: “What he finds most baffling is the southern preoccupation with the past, with its pervasive influence on the present. To him, the Sutpen tragedy is a paradigm of that influence, particularly in the person of Jim Bond, a character who fascinates Shreve at the end of the chapter for this reason.” (*William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom! A Critical Study*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987, 147.)

Kissing her maybe, her hand maybe which would lie in his and even touch his lips like a dead hand because of the desperate casting for this straw or that; maybe as he went out he said *she will go to him* (the lawyer); *if I were to wait five minutes I could see her in the shawl. So probably by tonight I will be able to know—if I cared to know.* Maybe by night he did, maybe before that if they managed to find him, get word to him, because she went to the lawyer. And it was right in the lawyer's alley. Maybe before she even got started telling it good that gentle white glow began like when you turn up a wick; maybe he could even almost see his hand writing on into the space . . . Because maybe" (254)<sup>314</sup>

The assertive mode emerging from an overuse of the language of probability is reinforced because the story develops through the assumption of conjectures that are manifestly and repeatedly absorbed into the narrative as reliable facts. Edwin Hunter's assertion that "Shreve is mainly responsible for the measure of conjecture by which gaps in the story are closed and questions answered," appears clear upon seeing that gaps such as the conversation in the library, Bon's past, or the narrative enigma itself, are freely created in order to fit the story as a whole and to "overpass" (261), to go on.<sup>315</sup> Even episodes such as Henry's introduction to Bon's mother in New Orleans (277), and superb characters such as the lawyer are added as part of the amazing revitalization of the story out of pure imagination. Since I analyze the construction of Charles Bon in next chapter, I shall merely provide the best example of the grandiosity of Shreve's inventions by recalling the figure of the lawyer writing in his ledger:

Sure, that's who it would be: the lawyer, that lawyer with his private mad female millionaire to farm, who probably wasn't interested enough in the money to see whether the checks had any other writing on them when she signed them—that lawyer who, with Bon's mother already plotting and planning him since before he could remember (and even if she didn't know it or whether she knew it or not or would have cared or not) for that day when he should be translated quick into so much rich and rotting dirt, had already been plowing and planting and harvesting him and the mother both as if he already was—that lawyer who maybe had the secret drawer in the secret safe and the secret paper in it, maybe a chart with colored pins stuck into it like generals have in campaigns, and all the notations in code: *Today he finished robbing a drunken Indian of a hundred miles of virgin land, val. 25,000.*

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<sup>314</sup> See other remarkable examples on pages 244-5, 247, 248, 272.

<sup>315</sup> Edwin R. Hunter, *William Faulkner: Narrative Practice and Prose Style*. Washington and Lothian: Windhover Press, 1973, 76.

*At 2:31 today came up out of swamp with final plank for house, val in conj. with land 40,000. 7:52 p.m. today married. Bigamy threat val. minus nil. unless quick buyer. Not probable. Doubtless conjoined with wife same day. Say 1 year and then with maybe the date and the hour too: Son. Intrinsic val. possible though not probable forced sale of house & land plus val. crop minus child's one quarter. Emotional val. plus 100% times nil. plus val. crop. Say 10 years, one or more children. Intrinsic val. forced sale house & improved land plus liquid assets minus children's share. Emotional val. 100% times increase yearly for each child plus intrinsic val. plus liquid assets plus working acquired credit and maybe here with the date too: Daughter and you could maybe even have seen the question mark after it and the other words even: daughter? daughter? daughter? trailing off not because thinking trailed off, but on the contrary thinking stopping right still then, backing up a little and spreading like when you lay a stick across a trickle of water, spreading and rising slow all around him in whatever place it was that he could lock the door to and sit quiet and subtract the money that Bon was spending on his whores and his champagne from what his mother had, and figure up how much would be left of it tomorrow and next month and next year or until Sutpen would be good and ripe—thinking about the good hard cash that Bon was throwing away on his horses and clothes and the champagne and gambling and women (he would have known about the octoroon and the left handed marriage long before the mother did even if it had been any secret; maybe he even had a spy in the bedroom like he seems to have had in Sutpen's; maybe he even planted her, said to himself like you do about a dog: *He is beginning to ramble. He needs a block. Not a tether: just a light block of some sort, so he cant get inside of anything that might have a fence around it*) and only him to try to check it, or as much as he dared, and not getting far because he knew too that all Bon had to do was to go to his mother and the racehorse would have a gold eating trough if he wanted it and, if the jock wasn't careful, a new jockey too—counting up the money, figuring what he would net at this normal rate over the next few years, against what it looked like would be left of it to net from by that time, and meanwhile crucified between his two problems: whether maybe what he ought to do was to wash his hands of the Sutpen angle and clean up what was left and light out for Texas. (248)*

I have already briefly analyzed the narrative discourse to affirm that the novel suggests that the crucial passages in italics of the Civil War are told by Shreve. This would imply him as the very author of the revelation that Bon is part black. However, as this is a genuinely ambiguous passage, I want to underline that Shreve's pointing at

miscegenation as the solution to the story does not depend on this unique passage.<sup>316</sup>

Furthermore, in his free treatment of what he has been told, Shreve dares to correct even the supposedly witnessed information provided by more proximate narrators. He corrects Quentin with the conviction of an omniscient narrator:

“Because your old man was wrong here, too! He said it was Bon who was wounded, but it wasn’t. Because who told him? Who told Sutpen, or your grandfather either, which of them it was who was hit? Sutpen didn’t know because he wasn’t there, and your grandfather wasn’t there either because that was where he has hit too, where he lost his arm. So who told them? Not Henry, because his father never saw Henry but that one time and maybe they never had time to talk about wounds and besides to talk about wounds in the Confederate army in 1865 would be like coal miners talking about soot; and not Bon, because Sutpen never saw him at all because he was dead; —it was not Bon, it was Henry; (283)<sup>317</sup>

Blatantly, as several critics have noted, Shreve’s extraordinary effort at disavowing Mr Compson’s information nonetheless unveils the inaccuracy of his own sources and his mastery of the creation of narrative pathos, since Bon would be responsible for saving Henry’s life.

Mr Compson’s introduction of imagined words and thoughts is minimal in contrast to Shreve’s fervent and even excessive adoption of this strategy as his principal mode of narration. In fact, Bon’s thoughts are the basis for the construction of his tragic character as a mulatto

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<sup>316</sup> See a brief analysis of the passages in “Narrative Strategies, n. 12. If Gerald Langford is accurate at this point in his comparison of *Absalom, Absalom!*’s manuscript and book, Faulkner’s first dubious passage on the Civil War in italics was first thought as clearly pronounced by Shreve, which, made more ambiguous still suggests the narrative voice is in the consecutive passages Shreve’s, yet he enforces the suggestion rather than asserting voice here. This detail explains the powerful resemblance of this passages’ language to Shreve’s speech (*Faulkner’s Revision of Absalom, Absalom! A Collation of the Manuscript and the Published Book*. Austin and London: U of Texas P, 1971, 344.)

<sup>317</sup> A similar example can be seen with regards to the picture had in her hand when Henry murdered Bon: “And your old man wouldn’t know about that too: why the black son of a bitch should have taken her picture out and put the octoroon’s picture in, so he invented a reason for it. But I know.” (295)

and as a son abandoned by his father. As an example of this, we see how Shreve constructs crucial new episodes like the conversation in the library:

“So the old man sent the nigger for Henry,” Shreve said. “ And Henry came in and the old man said ‘They cannot marry because he is your brother’ and Henry said ‘You lie’ like that, that quick: no space, no interval, no nothing between like when you press the button and get light in the room. And the old man just sat there, didn’t even move and strike him and so Henry didn’t say ‘You lie’ again because he knew now it was so; he just said ‘It’s not true’, not ‘I dont believe it’ but ‘It’s not true’ because he could maybe see the old man’s face again now and demon or not (242)

and when he constructs Bon’s willingness to be acknowledged through his overexposed thoughts:

*maybe who could know how many times he looked at Henry’s face and thought, not there but for the intervening leaven of that blood which we do not have in common is my skull, my brow, sockets, shape and angle of jaw and chin and some of my thinking behind it, and which he could see in my face in his turn if he but knew to look as I know but there, just behind a little, obscured a little by that alien blood whose admixing was necessary in order that he exist is the face of the man who shaped us both out of that blind chancy darkness which we call the future; there—there— at any moment, second, I shall penetrate by something of will and intensity and dreadful need, and strip that alien leaving from it and look not on my brother’s face whom I did not know I possessed and hence never missed, but my father’s out of the shadow of whose absence my spirit’s posthumeity has never escaped (262)*

Using direct speech, the Canadian narrator diligently develops the invented tension in Henry’s struggle to accept incest in order to allow the marriage:

think how they must have talked, how Henry would say, ‘He should have told me. He should have told me, myself, himself. I was fair and honorable with him. I waited. You know now why I waited. I gave him every chance to tell me himself. But he didn’t tell me. I thought at first it was because he didn’t know. Then I knew that he did know, and still I waited. But he didn’t tell me. He just told you, sent me a message like you send a command by a nigger servant to a beggar or a tramp to clear out. Dont you see that? And Henry would say, ‘But

Judith. Our sister. Think of her' and Bon: 'All right. Think of her. Then what? because they both knew what Judith would do when she found it out because they both knew that women will show pride and honor about almost anything except love, and Henry said, 'Yes. I see. I understand. But you will have to give me time to get used to it. You are my older brother; you can do that little for me.' (281)<sup>318</sup>

Shreve takes Mr Compson's aim at persuading Quentin (or his audience) further with his speculations. Here he sees clearly that, although Quentin and Shreve's words can indeed be regarded as a "some happy marriage of speaking and hearing" (261) and can even be confused (275), they nonetheless disagree on some points of the story. Shreve obstinately wants Quentin to accept his view, as when Shreve tries to describe Bon and Judith's relationship:

And maybe he had even thought about her by that time; maybe at the times when he would be telling himself *it cant be so; he could not look at me like this every day and make no sing if it were so* he would even tell himself *She would be easy* like when you have left the champagne on the supper table and are walking toward the whiskey on the sideboard and you happen to pass a cup of lemon sherbet on a tray and you look at the sherbet and tell yourself, That would be easy too only who wants it.—Does that suit you?"

"But it's not love," Quentin said.

"Because why not? Because listen. (265)

As François Pitavy has demonstrated, Shreve's language is highly connoted.<sup>319</sup> Shreve's references to Sutpen as "demon" (147, 149, 244, 285), to Rosa Coldfield as "Aunt Rosa" in spite of Quentin's disapprovals (146-7, 268, 288, 295), or to Rosa's spinsterhood, and Clytie's in terms of a dead sexuality by referring to her "raw meat" (288, 147), and to Charles Bon's mother as "the old Sabine" (250), are impressionist brushstrokes that complement other more elaborate expressions of disdain, such as when he refers to Sutpen by saying:

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<sup>318</sup> The occasions where Shreve imagines words and thoughts are almost innumerable, but very remarkable passages can be found on pages 260 and 270.

<sup>319</sup> François Pitavy, "The Narrative Voice and Function of Shreve: Remarks on the Production of *Absalom, Absalom!*" *William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!: A Critical Casebook*. Ed. Elisabeth Muhlenfeld. New York: Garland, 1984. 88-109. His is one of the most detailed linguistic approaches to *Absalom, Absalom!* To see the richness of Faulkner's language, another interesting study on *Go Down, Moses* is Michael J. Toolan, *The Stylistics of Fiction: A literary-linguistic approach*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990; and Edwin R. Hunter.

“this Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub fled hiding from some momentary flashy glare of his Creditor’s outraged face exasperated beyond all endurance, hiding, scuttling into respectability like a jackal into a rockpile . . . this Faustus who appeared suddenly one Sunday with two pistols and twenty subsidiary demons” (148). Shreve’s language also distinguishes him from Quentin, as David Paul Ragan argues using the example of the “old meat,” which for him “hardly sounds at all like something he has heard from Quentin, who manifests an extreme reluctance to ascribe any motivation to physical desire or need throughout the novel. . . . This flippancy in dealing with sexual matters is a far cry from Quentin’s hypersensibility about the subject” (92).

Shreve’s connoted language is also extremely judgmental, for example when referring to the South, as when he sarcastically says “we don’t live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?” (297); or to the characters, as when he says of Jim Bond that “if your father had asked him if he was Charles Bon’s son he not only would not have known either, he wouldn’t have cared” (178); or when he scorns his imagined figure of Charles Bon’s mother:

he would be able to get her out of the office before she had sat down and into the carriage again and on the way home where, among the Florentine mirrors and Paris drapes and tufted camisoles, she would still look like the one that had come in to scrub the floors, in the black dress that the cook wouldn’t have looked at even when it was new five or six years ago (252).

Indeed, his discourse contributes to the construction of characters by making fun of them, as Yamaguchi fully explains offering as examples the Canadian narrator’s caricatures in “turning Bon’s mother into a dowdy harpy with flamethrower eyes and the lawyer into a slimy pettifogger who might have escaped from a sketch of the Old Southwest” (226).

His male chauvinism also transpires in his narrative when Bon abandons the octoroon: “(and thank God you can flee, can escape from that massy five-foot-thick maggot-cheesy solidarity which overlays the earth, in which men and women in couples are ranked and racked like ninepins; thanks to whatever Gods for that masculine

hipless tapering peg which fits light and glib to move where the cartridge-chambered hips of women hold them fast)” (257).<sup>320</sup>

Most important, even for the sake of the story, is that behind Shreve’s apparently rational conclusion—quoted at length in the next chapter—that “So it takes two niggers to get rid of one Sutpen” (310) lies a strongly judgmental statement.

In addition to what Dorrit Cohn analyses as the verbalization of ideas “gnomically” and “adjectively,”<sup>321</sup> as the novel advances, and increasingly in the three last chapters, the frame narrator comments on the narrative, and functions as a key indicator of Shreve’s unreliability. This is remarkable because, as Heide Ziegler suggests, Faulkner “never has gone to such lengths questioning, and finally undermining, one narrator through the narrative voice of another as in *Absalom, Absalom!*”<sup>322</sup> The overnarrator warns the reader of the fragility of Quentin and Shreve’s discourse, always interrupting Shreve’s narrative:

Names, blooms which Shreve possibly had never heard and never seen although the air had blown over him first which became tempered to nourish them—and it would not matter here that the time had been winter in that garden too and hence no bloom nor leaf even if there had been someone to walk there and be seen there since, judged by subsequent events, it had been night in the garden also. But it did not matter because it had been so long ago. It did not matter to them (Quentin and Shreve) anyway (243)

and

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<sup>320</sup> Noel Polk has deeply contributed to the study of women and gender issues in general in Faulkner’s novels and has analyzed the force of gynophobia in his works (*Children*). See also Sally Page, *Faulkner’s Women: Characterization and Meaning*. Deland: Everett Edwards, 1972; and Leslie Heywood, “The Shattered Glass: The Blank Space of Being in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *The Faulkner Journal* III:2 (Spring 1988): 12-23; Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*. Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1994; Minrose C. Gwin, *The Feminine and Faulkner: Reading (Beyond) Sexual Difference*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1990.

<sup>321</sup> Dorrit Cohn means by the first the narrators’ “generalizing judgmental sentences that are grammatically set apart from the narrative by being cast in the present tense”; and by the second, the narrators’ intervention in the narration “by judgmental phrases that infiltrate descriptive and narrative language and that often apply to the other characters of the fictional world.” “Discordant Narration.” *Style* 34.2 (Summer 2000): 308.

<sup>322</sup> Heide Ziegler, “The Fragile Pandora’s Box of Scrawled Paper: A Different Reading of *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 42.4 (1997): 645.

wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) 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. (261)

and more incisively, on the vagueness of Shreve's knowledge:

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 shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least, to Shreve) shades too quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporizing breath. (250)

Likewise, it alerts the reader to Shreve's "inventions":

—four of them who sat in that drawing room of baroque and fusty magnificence which Shreve had invented and which was probably true enough, while the Haiti-born daughter of the French sugar planter and the woman who Sutpen's first father-in-law had told him was a Spaniard (the slight dowdy woman with untidy gray-streaked raven hair coarse as a horse's tail, with parchment-colored skin and implacable pouched black eyes which alone showed no age because they showed no forgetting, whom Shreve and Quentin had likewise invented and which was likewise probably true enough (276)

Finally, the second person narrative situation raises the reader's suspicion, for she or he cannot understand why the narrator less familiar with the story is telling the most difficult parts of it, while the most learned one, the focal character and recipient of the story remains virtually "in exile." As Ragan observes,

It is difficult to credit Shreve's account as being more real, more believable than Quentin's, since his roommate is the source of all Shreve knows about Sutpen and his family. Here Shreve assumes the role of the novelist himself, creating characters to fit the needs of his plot (such as his fabricated lawyer in New Orleans) or altering the circumstances to heighten the emotional drama (as in his reversal of which man had been wounded in Shiloh). (123)

Although I cannot pause here to provide the theoretical background for the effects of this interesting technique, I want to underline that

second person narrative situations create a self-conscious storytelling (and thus it is a device of metafiction) and generate appropriate grounds for unreliability, since the narrators tend to tell the story of the character that is at the same time his or her narratee.<sup>323</sup> Thus, this awkward situation often invites speculation, judgment and imposition of personal accounts.<sup>324</sup> In Shreve and Quentin's narrative situation, the awkwardness is furthermore relevant because Shreve is Canadian and has much less knowledge about the South than Quentin. In fact, we perceive that Sutpen's story can be read as representative of the History of the South, as M. E. Bradford argues Quentin's story might be too.<sup>325</sup>

All the analyzed narrative sources go beyond what we have described as a persuasive voice, since Shreve's fictionalization of Sutpen's story and the intrusion of his sarcastic subjectivity, as well as his willingness to find the figures that fit the 'lacks,' as Theresa Towner would say, make him a voice that the novel as a whole renders suspect with

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<sup>323</sup> Evidently, second person narrative is one of the multiple devices that point to metafiction in *Absalom, Absalom!* Many others such as the expression of the limits of language, or the whole process of interpretation the narrators conduct have deserved this critical consideration. Among many others, see especially Peter Brooks; Daniel Krause "Reading Shreve's Letters and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Studies in American Fiction* II (Fall 1983): 153-69; and Carolyn Porter, "The Reified Reader." *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1981. 241-275; Renard Doneskey, "'that pebble's watery echo': The Five Narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Heir and Prototype: Original and Derived Characterizations in Faulkner*. Ed. Dan Ford. Conway: U of Central Arkansas P, 1987. 113-132; and Owen Robinson's remarkable *Creating Yoknapatawpha: Readers and Writers in Faulkner's Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

<sup>324</sup> I cannot stop here to describe the rich effects of second person narrative. For further studies on this interesting narrative technique, see Monika Fludernik, ed., "Second-Person Narrative." Special Issue. *Style* 28.3 (Fall 1994); Bruce Morrisette, "Narrative 'You' in Contemporary Literature." *Comparative Literature Studies* 2 (1965): 1-24, included afterwards in a revised edition in *Novel and Film: Essays in Two Genres*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985; Dennis Scholfield, "Beyond *The Brain of Katherine Mansfield*: The Radical Potentials and Recuperations of Second-Person Narrative." *Style* 31.1 (Spring 1997): 96-117; Melissa Furrow, "Listening Reader and Impotent Speaker: The Role of Deixis in Literature." *Language and Style* 21.4 (Fall 1988): 365-378; Helmut Bonheim, "Narration in the Second Person." *Recherches anglaises et américaines* 16.1 (1983): 69-80; Brian Richardson, "The Poetics and Politics of Second Person Narrative." *Genre* 24.3 (Fall 1991): 309-330. To understand more deeply the effects of this technique refer to Émile Benveniste, "L'antonyme et le pronom en français moderne." *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Paris: Gallimard, 1974.

<sup>325</sup> M. E. Bradford, "Brother, Son, and Heir: The Structural Focus of Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Swanee Review*, 78.1 (Winter 1970): 76-98.

regards to the veracity of the story told, in other words the truth of the fictional reality. Shreve departs from the information given by witnesses to cover a section of the story that remained unknown to the other narrators—who have definitely much more access to the information, and which is moreover first-hand. By the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*, as Brodsky reminds us, there is “the step from grounded investigation to the unbounded creativity of imagination. This step is taken, and announced, in Shreve’s narration” (246). In this departure, he enters the fictional wood within the fiction, which is the only one that can satisfy the audience’s desire to complete the story, though at the expense of reliability. Nonetheless, Shreve’s unreliability is not always as apparent as in my prior analysis, since as Donnelly argues

The close attention to tenuously qualified details illustrates how carefully Shreve sorts through all possible causes and motives, as he questions and explores the ramifications of each, to find those that have the most power to explain. His method of inquiry, his attention to detail, works to assure us that he is on the right track and compels us to believe his conjectures, despite the numerous qualifying adverbs and phrases that appear in his narrative. (115)

This choice facing the reader between either trusting Shreve’s narrative or considering his an unreliable voice greatly contributes to *Absalom, Absalom!*’s narrative ambivalence, as we shall presently see.

#### **4. 3. Narrative voice in the complex structure of *Absalom, Absalom!***

We shall step back for a moment to be able to see the function of narrative voice in the narrative structure of *Absalom, Absalom!* as a whole. As we have seen, the novel presents an unsolvable narrative enigma, which creates an anxiety when the narrators and the reader attempt to understand Sutpen’s story, and which maintains the narrative tension at a high pitch. Based on a great deal of what the novel presents as historical material, the intrigue inspires resorting to imagination and fiction where there is a lack of information. To unfold the story, *Absalom, Absalom!* articulates a series of narrators whose degree of narrative reliability varies from fallible narrators to unreliable ones. If it is obvious that the novel questions from the outset whether a fully reliable narrative voice is possible, nonetheless, it sophisticates the degrees and the uses of reliability. As Albert

Guerard observes “not all conjectures, in *Absalom, Absalom!* have the same degree of truth, nor does Faulkner want us to think they do” (333).<sup>326</sup> By posing a powerful narrative enigma, Faulkner can elaborate different voices who share limited yet varied access to information and knowledge, and who have a different perception of their role as storytellers.

First, he develops Miss Rosa’s fallible voice, which is full of pain and contempt as a result of an outrageous experience that had occurred when she was young and which consequently delivers a story imbued with that tone. She has privileged first-hand knowledge, yet she is a fallible narrator, because not everything she tells is implicitly trustworthy, as we have seen, but her limited perspective both due to her life experience and her lack of sufficient knowledge does not result in a deliberate manipulation of the story through her telling. Following her, Mr Compson contributes an interest in solving what he considers to be an enigma, and sets out a pattern for the search for explanations to fill those gaps in the story that make it inexplicable. Through his addition of imagination and conjecture as the complements of (his) knowledge, he invites Quentin and the reader to believe that Henry’s problem with Charles Bon was bigamy. His voice elaborates narrative imagination as a way to fulfill certain recognized gaps by trying to convince, which allows us to distinguish his as a voice engaged in a process of persuasion. Like Marlow’s, this process of persuasion is underscored by the frequent appearance of signals merged in their narratives and detected through comparison to other voices. In the chapters that follow, the cautious yet fallible—due to his limited knowledge—Quentin offers a reflective halt in the narrative that allows us to consider prudence as a requirement for understanding the complexities of a profoundly Southern story, with which the novel closes, in “powerful ending and a proper one to seal off and preserve the bewildering suspension of elements the book has presented.”<sup>327</sup> Quentin’s voice creates a contrast to the subsequent unreliable voice. Shreve is the enthusiastic narrator who will offer the solution but whose voice is misleading, which is clear from the novel, for the information upon which he builds the story is not available, and thus

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<sup>326</sup> For a similar argument see, David Minter’s “‘Monk’ as a Guide to One Aspect of the Enduring Force of *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Faulkner’s Questioning Narratives: Fiction of His Major Phase, 1929-42*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2001, 101.

<sup>327</sup> Walter J. Slatoff. *Quest for Failure: A Study on William Faulkner*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1960, 201.

his telling offers a pretended truth to resolve an indecipherable enigma. In order to grasp the extent to which the idea of miscegenation might be subterfuge, Noel Polk offers another possibility for solving the narrative enigma that he shows is clearly embedded in the narrative. As the critic suggests,

It has hardly occurred to anybody in or out of the novel to wonder whether perhaps Henry kills Bon for the same reason that Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury* wants to murder Dalton Ames: to save—i.e., control—his sister’s virginity. Finally, the two half- or completely-naked young men for some reason or other fail to pursue the possible homoerotic relationship between Henry and Bon that Mr Compson so lasciviously points to as he describes the fey bon vivant from New Orleans who descends upon that provincial college in backwoods North Mississippi and changes Henry’s life. Perhaps the ruckus in the library on Christmas Eve, which servants hear through closed doors, is not at all about Bon and Judith but rather about Bon and Henry; perhaps Bon and Sutpen fail to come to terms over Judith’s dowry; perhaps Judith has herself rejected Bon and her father supports her wishes, to the dismay of both Bon and Henry who can, they believe, maintain a homoerotic relationship, what Mr Compson calls “the perfect incest,” through Judith, only under the cover of a respectable heterosexual marriage.<sup>328</sup>

The enormous difficulties faced by the narrators in solving the enigma heighten the problem of knowledge and the problem of language. The narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!*, like Marlow, have trouble in accessing the relevant information, at the same time as they realize that language lacks precision as a tool of communication. Thus the reach of the conventional truths found both in history and storytelling is radically questioned. Consequently, the novel ends up resorting to unreliability as a way of dealing with the relativism in the credibility of discourses which finally locates truth on the margins: the story needs to be told and explained, that is what matters, regardless of whether this is true or not.<sup>329</sup> Here lies one of the most important ambivalences of the novel.

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<sup>328</sup> Noel Polk, *Faulkner and Welty and the Southern Literary Tradition*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2008, 45. For a stronger comprehension on the crucial aspect of homosexuality between Quentin and Shreve which reflects too Bon and Henry’s, see his chapter “How Shreve Gets in to Quentin’s Pants.”

<sup>329</sup> Sonja Basic compares *The Sound and the Fury* to *Absalom, Absalom!* in the relationship between narrative voice and Truth: “in spite of its modernity, its high degree of defamiliarization, *The Sound and the Fury* relies on verisimilitude and

Faced with the obstacles to attaining the truth, the narrative voices of *Absalom, Absalom!* adopt the language of Southern oratory, which endows them with another kind of authority that lies in the power of rhetoric and the sharing of a codified set of beliefs that over time have acquired a linguistic formulation, and that conform a worldview shared by their audiences. So the oratorical voice produces a new authority based on the Myth of the South and the power of language as not fully dependent on truth, but on belief. The force and function of this linguistic discourse—crystallized in stereotypes—shall make it possible for us to understand in the next chapter the problematical intertwining of oratory and the articulation of cultural codes nested in it which definitely shape the story and plot of the novel.

Taken to the extreme, the aforementioned inscrutability of truth in *Absalom, Absalom!* culminates in the possibility of adopting race as the only plausible explanation for Charles Bon's murder. In glimpsing the abyss between truth and language and the crucial importance of plausibility, Shreve mobilizes the power of Southern oratory in the cause of fiction. Invention here substitutes cautious conjecture and fiction replaces persuasion. Liberated by fiction and narrative creation the story of Sutpen blooms and has a continuity that provides it with a fullness that will finally allow a moral closure to Sutpen's story, and to *Absalom, Absalom!* Seen from this angle, and certainly for the first-time reader, Shreve's account offers the most complete version of Sutpen's story. It finally clarifies the enigma: Henry Sutpen killed Charles Bon because he is "*the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister*" (294) and so, as Bon remarks to Henry, "*It's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you can't bear*" (293).

In concluding with an unreliable narration, the gradual presentation of degrees of reliability paradoxically leads to the only solution offered to the story. The movement is towards apparent clarification of the narrative enigma. Shreve makes the story much simpler and much more comprehensible in the context of the South, a simplification that

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referentiality to an extraordinary degree: the characters are 'true to life,' or appear to be so, in both their actions and their speech (their stream of consciousness is highly individualized, mimetic). Not so in *Absalom, Absalom!*, where they are often openly confessed and professed to be inventions, constructions, distorted by the various narrators and also—if I may coin a word—"denaturalized" through language." ("Faulkner's Narrative Discourse: Mediation and Mimesis." *New Directions in Faulkner's Studies*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1983. Ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1984, 318.)

is condensed in the final, deductive and prophetic paragraphs of the novel, as we will see. If we disregard the importance of truth as *Absalom, Absalom!* suggests so vehemently, and we empower creative fiction as the legitimate response to everything in our world that we cannot answer from our limited human perspective, Shreve's creative emancipation from the bonds of witnessing and the demands of accuracy offers a way out of the trap of an inapprehensible reality. In his very sensible comparison of Conrad and Faulkner, Kartiganer draws attention to precisely this point:

In the examples of Quentin and Shreve, Faulkner shows how the individual imagination goes beyond the self-satisfying (although intimately self-destroying) mode of mere illusion we find in Conrad, and becomes the source of universal meaning. And this is a triumph which, peculiarly, only the reader can verify. The difference between Quentin-Shreve and Charles Gould or Holroyd or Nostromo is like the difference between the two boys and Miss Rosa or Mr Compson: imagination has somehow transcended alibi and rationalization, has transcended even the myopic vision of the driven mind, and—in a collective conception—created something the reader calls “truth,” even as the “facts” tell him this need not be so.<sup>330</sup>

Seen from this angle, what appear to be the distortions of narrative to the seekers of truth, become, in the hands of talented fictional writers, the graces and the essence of fictional authority and wholeness.

Notwithstanding, William Faulkner's novels are neither Vladimir Nabokov's nor Italo Calvino's. Especially for Faulkner, but for Conrad as well, “writing . . . was not an intransitive verb (as dogmatic deconstructionists would have us believe); it was still a telling, a way of

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<sup>330</sup> Donald M. Kartiganer, “Process and Product: A Study of Modern Literary Form.” *The Massachusetts Review* 12 (Autumn 1971): 791. J. Hillis Miller makes a similar point when observing that: “If a storyteller tries to stick to the external facts and to reflect them in a perfect mimesis giving valid knowledge, evoking the past exactly as it was, sooner or later he starts extrapolating from the known facts and inventing episodes that may or may not have happened—as Shreve and Quentin do in their retelling of the story of Henry's murder of Charles. . . . That is, they alter the facts as known or go beyond them, beyond mimesis, to create something which is in one degree or another a fiction not wholly grounded in its exact correspondence to things as they are. Like all the other narrators in the linked chain of storytellers in *Absalom, Absalom!* they do this in order to make their story ‘perform,’ do something, accomplish some purpose in relation to themselves or others. They try to use storytelling to make something happen in the world. In adding to the facts, however, they fail to fulfill the demand for a wholly accurate narration” (*Fiction* 166).

speaking of the world, in the world, to the world,” in André Bleikasten’s words.<sup>331</sup> The striving for truth (either fictional or worldly) is still too prevalent in the Mississippian writer, as the novel itself demonstrates by its very preoccupation with quoting sources and following the trails of the historical agents. And it is really important for *Absalom, Absalom!*’s focal character, Quentin Compson, who is the recipient of the fragmented story of Thomas Sutpen. His story is unavoidably historical. Told in any other way it runs the risk of distortion and of misunderstanding of the conflicts in the hearts of a whole region. In this light, the narrative unreliability is significant, as the frame narrator does not fail to note. It is significant because the retelling of Sutpen’s story can only permit enigmas if we are to understand the historical complexity, as well as if we want to preserve the elusive nature of language and of knowledge, remarkably that which helps to reconstruct a past that would illuminate the present. And so, in the combination of narrative voices which bespeak different degrees of reliability, along with the insistent erosion of narrative authority as conventionally understood, and the limitations of access to knowledge and the incapacity of language to fairly explain a story, Faulkner develops a dynamic novel that propels the reader forward by forcing him or her to stand upon increasingly unstable grounds. If the juxtaposition of narrative voices graduates and exposes a variety of distances between narrator and story, which result from different reasons related to the personalization of the voices, and their particular attitudes to and understanding of storytelling; however, their order in the narrative establishes a progression that moves towards the most extreme questioning of narrative credibility—unreliable narration. Although the reader is driven to engage in a process of persuasion that would eventually foray into fiction to fulfill expectations in a convincing way, the presence of the other narrative voices—notably that of Quentin as a beholder and recipient of the whole process of narration—once again instills doubt, as in *Lord Jim*, over the resolution of the story and the credibility of the telling. In this sense, caught between reliance on a truth that is lost in the ashes of history and locked to memory, and a pretended truth which is made possible by sacrificing knowledge in the form of a substituting plausible belief, the reader is left with the enveloping effect of the ambivalence in which both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Lord Jim* are steeped. What the story tells shall demonstrate not only the origin of the

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<sup>331</sup> André Bleikasten, *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner’s Novels from The Sound and the Fury to Light in August*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990, 353.

narrator's attitudes to the story and to the telling but, more importantly, the way in which the overall ambivalence created in the narrative reverts to the ambivalence with which the struggling South tries to apprehend both its past and its present, whether in 1865, in 1910, or in 1936, as John Matthews observes:

If the narrator of *Flags in the Dust* fails to achieve critical detachment from the dream of the plantation South, and if *The Sound and the Fury* subsequently abandons traditional narrative altogether because survivors of a corrupt ideal have become estranged from familiar stories of self and community, then we might see *Absalom, Absalom!* as inventing a kind of narrative discourse that *incorporates* the conflict between being too close and too far at the same time.<sup>332</sup>

It is precisely the production of historical ambivalence in fiction, read through the representation of racial issues in the novel, what is the object of next chapter.

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<sup>332</sup> John T. Matthews, *William Faulkner: Seeing Through the South*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 175.



## 5. NARRATING THE MYTH OF A RACIAL SOUTH: MISCEGENATION AND THE 'NEGRO' IN *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*

Relationships between writers are to be treated with caution since they can be both illuminating and misleading—and even more so when they are affected by social factors such as “racial” differences.<sup>333</sup> On many occasions we find literary opinions affected by ideological points of view or personal animosities. But this is not the case here. Richard Wright’s newspaper article on William Faulkner, “L’Home du Sud,” written to celebrate his compatriot’s Nobel Prize win in 1950, certainly shows such a profound and generous comprehension of his task and achievement that his words are worth recalling at length:

I doubt seriously if Faulkner has ever written one line of what could be called propaganda. In fact I doubt if he would even know how. Simply to represent, in terms of form, color, movement, light, mood, and atmosphere has been the most notable hallmark of every Faulkner book from *Sartoris* to *Intruder in the Dust*.

The achievement of Faulkner is all the more arresting in that he is a southern white man, the product of a section of America which has withstood and nursed the stings of the Civil War defeat which it could never accept, and misinterpreted that defeat in the most infantile and emotional manner. The literature of the white South, as well as its public life, has been for almost a century under a pressure as intense and cruel as that under which the Negro was forced to live; and it would be a grave mistake to feel that the Negro was the only victim of the white South’s proud neurosis. The almost atavistic clinging to the “aristocracy of the skin,” the reduction of the all life’s values to the protection of the “white supremacy,” crippled not only the Negro but the entire culture of the whites themselves. . . .

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<sup>333</sup> It is hard to find in Faulkner any signs of friendship with his contemporary African American writers. Of his contact with and opinions on Richard Wright’s work, there is real praise for his novel *Native Son*, and a dismissing of *Black Boy*. Faulkner’s comments are found in “Interviews in Japan,” in James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-1962*. 1968. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1980; and his letter to him on September 11, 1945 (Joseph Blotner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*. New York: Random House, 1977, 201). See Thadious M. Davis’ comparison of the way both authors dealt with racial issues in their literature, “Wright, Faulkner, and Mississippi as Racial Memory.” *Callaloo* 28. Richard Wright: A Special Issue (Summer 1986): 469-478.

In the realm of artistic expression, the pressure to ensure conformity was almost as fierce as that which Russian Communists bring to bear upon their artists. Southern American art fell under the interdiction of “protecting the South’s reputation,” and no man save the hardiest dared challenge this standard. . . .

But the South could not remain isolated forever; wars, and convulsions of social change were bound to engulf it; industrialization induced such impersonal social relations that controls loosened and allowed a certain degree of negative freedom, and it was in this transition period of confusion that the genius of Faulkner leaped through and presented itself to a startled world.

The main burden of Faulkner’s work is moral confusion and social decay and it presents these themes in terms of stories of violence enacted by fantastic characters. . . .

But like all great art, the work of Faulkner cannot be restricted to merely the South when one attempts to unravel its implications. Southern American fear is basically no different from fear anywhere; and the obsessive compulsion to violence in the South obtains wherever men are men.<sup>334</sup>

Wright sees in Faulkner “l’home du Sud,” and understands his work’s extraordinary force emerging from the Southern context of extreme violence, radical transformation, and the breaking down of established racial and social ideologies. This moral confusion and social tension disrupts the language in the mind of a talented writer who, away from propaganda but under pressure from regional and national forces, struggles with the pace of historical change, but who is still pulled by the nostalgic memories of old times. Assuming that literature has a universal reach due to “that dialectical leap in meaning which art possesses” (200), Wright fully comprehends the distressed portrayal of the South and his white and thus biased presentation of racial issues. It is precisely from this perspective that I would like to examine Faulkner’s literary representation of racial distinctions and relations.

## 5. 1. The Myth of the South as a framework to the novel

An important part of the explanation for the representation of racial issues in *Absalom, Absalom!* might reside in the complex and slippery idea of the “myth.” The novel is embedded and framed within the so

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<sup>334</sup> Michel Fabre, *Richard Wright: Books and Writers*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1990, 199.

called “Southern myth,” “the Myth of the Lost Cause,” or just, “the Old South.” This aimed at preserving the South’s reputation in a way that, as Wright observed, it conditions and exposes to light the construction of whiteness or, which I consider the same in Faulkner and in the South, the representation of African Americans. In order to understand this frame, some theoretical and historical context shall be provided.

Many critics, writers, anthropologists and historians have attempted to define the “myth,” assuming the risk involved in disentangling such an abstract multilayered artifact. And yet, abstract concepts like this one might be highly suggestive. This is exactly what Faulkner aims at in his borrowing of the mythical framework in this novel. Thus, it would be no less fraught with peril to avoid such a crucial aspect in Faulkner’s work. If we overlap the several perspectives from which the concept of “myth” has been explored, we find a multilayered figure that has much in common with the very notion of the “stereotype” as presented in Chapter 1. The “myth,” like the “stereotype,” shapes both a form and a historical and cultural object. The “stereotype” is an ambivalent structure, in Bhabha’s description, and a codified set of notions and features according to the common general descriptions of the concept. Likewise, the “myth” contains both a structure and a grouping of information with historical or pseudo-historical origin. This is particularly relevant to our purpose of maintaining the indivisible fusion of historical and linguistic aspects of literary works in our study. However, there is no appropriate bibliography linking both aspects, which would have helped me in guiding my understanding of the intersections between narrative and history in the myth. This is due to the fact that “Myth” has been studied either in relation to history or to classical mythology, but not in its form as a narrative text that explains a historical “myth” or a “myth of foundation.” Thus, I shall undertake my personal assessment of the articulation of a narrative form and a historical account. Even though it is not my intention to venture too far into the broad field of the study of myth in literature, I will borrow some ideas by prominent anthropologists, historians and literary critics to highlight the functions of the Myth of the South in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Claude Lévi-Strauss’ defined myth from a structural point of view in order to unveil and theorize the complex repetitive pattern that had in too many cases looked contradictory to anthropologists in his well-

known essay “The Structural Study of Myth.” Despite the criticism of this anthropologist’s ideas over the myth, some of his remarks might be helpful for us. While I am aware that condensing such flexible and historically complex myths like those that make up what has been referred to as “the myth of the South” might risk simplification, it still seems to me that Lévi-Strauss analysis of the contradictory nature of myth is very illuminating. He asserts that:

On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its first stages—anyway, long ago. But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. . . . It is that double structure, altogether historical and ahistorical, which explains that myth, while pertaining to the realm of the *parole* and calling for an explanation as such, as well as to that of the *langue* in which it is expressed, can also be an absolute object on a third level which, though it remains linguistic by nature, is nevertheless distinct from the other two.<sup>335</sup>

Beyond the peculiar nature of myth in its placement between language and history, what matters to the anthropologist is the internal combination of constituent units of the myth in order to set up a pattern that represents the basis of its functioning. By establishing a set of four columns in his dissection of the myth of Oedipus and further applying them to the Zuni emergence myth, Lévi-Strauss notices that myth is founded upon contradictory correlations that create bundles of associated units ordered in synchronic columns. Thus, contradiction is inherent in the way human beings try to build a cosmology. A closer look at the pattern of contradictory correlations shows Lévi-Strauss that “by a correlation of this type, the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life verifies the cosmology by its similarity of structure” (216). What is relevant for us here is what is relevant for the author too: that myth expresses the contradictions of cosmology and, while these cannot be overcome, they resolve into new contradictive relations of units creating a basic pattern of repetition inherent in any myth. The only way to compensate for the lack of synthesis is that “the inability to connect two kinds of relationships is overcome (or rather replaced) by the

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<sup>335</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth.” *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, 1963, 209.

positive statement that contradictory relationships are identical inasmuch as they are both self-contradictory in a similar way” (216).

Although I am not fond of applying concepts and theoretical frameworks to distant cases, Lévi-Strauss’ perspective might revise our way of studying myths in two ways: 1. It helps us understand the middle ground occupied by myth, which is both linguistic and historical and yet simultaneously neither one nor the other, as well as in its “two dimensional time referent which is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic” (209); 2. It sets a pattern of contradictory correlations of units that express the tension between beliefs and experience, to create a cosmology that unavoidably contains them without any possible resolution if not by seeing the contradictory units as alike.

As with all myths, to determine what belongs to that myth and to draw its contours is highly problematic, and this is no less true with the Southern Myth. In referring to the Myth, the most relevant specialist in Southern oratory defines some of the features of the myth with the Southern phenomenon in mind: “These sources suggest that the myth draws upon memory and imagination; that it results from a collective effort over a considerable period of time; that it represents an oversimplification of events, persons, and relationships; that it is more emotional than logical in its substance; and that it combines both reality and fiction. In other words, it is the product of considerable abstracting on the part of many people” (*The Oral Tradition* 68). Indeed, difficult as it is to define it, the feeling that there is actually a cluster of codes, arguments, and stories that has been operative for a long time—whether national or other kinds of myths—is there. It is so overwhelmingly present that it has compelled such a well-known Southern critic as Noel Polk to defy its powerful and wearisome imposition by writing an autobiographical book entitled *Outside the Southern Myth*.<sup>336</sup> In this sense, this set of multiple codes should not be taken as “The South” but rather as a discourse that was operative in the organization of social relations of power, at the same time that it elaborated an image some Southerners might identify with. Paradoxically, the myth both organized the relations of power in the South and expressed the disempowerment in relation to the North-American nation that was forming in opposition to its values: this was a myth of a defeated and besieged homeland in its effort to overcome its predicament. Consequently, the discourse of the New South Creed

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<sup>336</sup> Noel Polk, *Outside the Southern Myth*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1997.

instilled a defensive rhetoric based on a siege mentality that was very effective in regulating social and racial hierarchies in the domestic space.<sup>337</sup> I shall start introducing the “Myth of the South” by quoting the words of the distinguished literary critic Irving Howe. In his eyes,

like any other myth, it is a story or cluster of stories that expresses the deepest attitudes and reflects the most fundamental experiences of a people. And its subject, in this case, is the fate of a ruined homeland. The homeland—so the story goes—had proudly insisted that it alone should determine its destiny; provoked into a war impossible to win, it had nevertheless fought to its last strength; and it had fought this war with a reckless gallantry and a superb heroism that, as Faulkner might say, made of its defeat not a shame but almost a vindication.<sup>338</sup>

While Howe’s description binds the most important ingredients that reveal the presence of the Southern myth, and its version in the shape of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Lévi-Strauss’ two shifts in perspective illuminate Southern cosmology and the logical outcomes of the story of Thomas Sutpen. Without losing the historical perspective of the myth which will be introduced afterwards, by reservedly following Lévi-Strauss observations the Myth of the South can be considered not only as the creation of a cosmology of the foundational forces of the South as a region, and thus referring in historical terms to the antebellum South, but also as the memory of those forces as perpetuated in the New South, in a particularly painful way. While the Myth of the South seems to originate as a response to a time when the South’s “peculiar institution” of slavery, and the plantation system as its positive side, were starting to be fiercely questioned by abolitionists in the North and abroad in the decades prior to the Civil War,<sup>339</sup> its force intensifies

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<sup>337</sup> See how frequently evidence of this siege mentality appears in the speeches compiled in W. Stuart Towns, *Oratory and Rhetoric in the Nineteenth Century: A Rhetoric of Defense*. Westport and London: Praeger, 1998.

<sup>338</sup> Irving Howe, “The Southern Myth and William Faulkner.” *American Quarterly* 3.4 (Winter 1951): 360. See also a consideration of the myth and history in relation to *Absalom, Absalom!* in John Pilkington. *The Heart of Yoknapatawpha*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1981.

<sup>339</sup> In his famous essay “The Search for a Southern Identity” originally published in 1959, C. Vann Woodward reflects on the central role of slavery in the old Southern identity, as well as on the myths the South is already leaving behind: “Once more the South finds itself with a morally discredited Peculiar Institution on its hands. The last time this happened, about a century ago, the South’s defensive reaction was to identify its whole cause with the one institution that was most vulnerable and to make loyalty to an ephemeral aspect which it had once led in condemning the cardinal test of loyalty to the whole tradition. Southerners who rejected the test were

notably with the Confederate defeat, and the resulting abolition of slavery and destruction of the plantation system. As James C. Cobb argues in his thoughtful study *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* that even though “Woodward observed wryly that the Old South was the New South’s most ‘significant invention’,”

most of the fundamental elements of the Old South idyll had actually been laid down by the proslavery writers and orators in their idealized vision of what things had supposedly been like before the genteel old Cavaliers had begun to give way to Daniel Hundley’s uncouth and totally mercenary ‘cotton snobs.’ The Civil War and Reconstruction not only provided the white South with its own distinctive experience, but it fast-forwarded the antebellum southern order through the process of aging and historical distancing. By the end of Reconstruction, what had simply been the South in 1860 had become ‘the Old South,’ frozen away in some distant corner of time and accessible only through the imagination.<sup>340</sup>

This sharp discursive division between the Old and New South, thus, is not so marked if we think of some continuities in the organization of socioeconomic power through a “racially” determined inequality between individuals. Indeed, as Kenneth Warren warns, the viability of inequality was simply transformed after the abolition of slavery, and reinforced from many sources, including relevant texts of realist

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therefore forced to reject the whole heritage. . . . The Cavalier Legend as the myth of origin was one of the earlier victims. The Plantation Legend of ante bellum grace and elegance has not been left wholly intact. The pleasant image of a benevolent and paternalistic slavery system as a school for civilizing savages has suffered damage that is probably beyond repair. Even the consoling security of Reconstruction as the common historic grievance, the infallible mystique of unity, has been rendered somewhat less secure by detached investigation. And finally, rude hands have been laid upon the hallowed memory of the Redeemers who did in the Carpetbaggers, and doubt has been cast upon the antiquity of segregation folkways. These faded historical myths have become weak material for buttressing Southern defenses, for time has dealt as roughly with them as with agrarianism and racism.” *The Burden of Southern History*. 1960. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1993, 12-3.

<sup>340</sup> James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007, 73. Among the many books that trace the continuities of racial relations from slavery to segregation, see C. Vann Woodward, *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1971; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*. New York and London: Oxford UP, 1984; Eric Foner’s *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution: 1863-1877*. 1988. New York: Francis Parkman Club Edition, History Book Club, 2005; and George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American & South African History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981.

literature at the end of the century.<sup>341</sup> Four decades ago, in his analysis of the New South Creed from the perspective of mythmaking, Paul Gaston's observations already entangled his general ideas on mythmaking and the touchtone of race relations in the South—a historical construction of Southern identity that Cobb has recently traced:

Myths are something more than advertising slogans and propaganda ploys rationally connected to a specific purpose. They have a subtle way of permeating the thought and conditioning the actions even of those who may be rationally opposed to their consequences. They arise out of complex circumstances to create mental sets which do not ordinarily yield to intellectual attacks. The history of their dynamics suggests that they may be penetrated by rational analysis only as the consequence of dramatic, or even traumatic, alterations in the society whose essence they exist to portray. Thus, the critique and dissipation of myths becomes possible only when tension between the mythic view and the reality it sustains snaps the viability of their relationship, creates new social patterns and with them new harmonizing myths.

The New South myth has been no exception. In race relations, it formed the intellectual and moral touchtone to which all discussion of the Negro's role in Southern society was ineluctably referred for more than half of the present century. Influential in different ways, it has exerted its power over demagogues and racists as well as liberal reformers and well-meaning paternalists. Negroes and white Northerners have likewise responded to and been shaped by it, and much of foreign opinion has reflected its power. This is not to say that the dominant racial attitudes of the twentieth century all derived from the New South myth or that it was the first universally accepted conceptualization of racial sentiments. The fundamental ambivalences of hate and love, fear and trust, oppression and paternalism, repulsion

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<sup>341</sup> As he argues: "Egalitarianism, too, seemed to fly in the face of the need to discriminate. W. A. Dunning argued that 'slavery had been a *modus vivendi* through which social life was possible; and that, after its disappearance, its place must be taken by some set of conditions which, if more humane and beneficent in accidents, must in essence express the same fact of racial inequality.' Racial segregation of American public space provided this new set of conditions. Like the slavery apologists before them, segregationists had at hand a variety of sources—religious, scientific, and historical—to draw upon for arguments, strategies, and rationales for dividing the nation along racial lines. What also aided segregationists in the post-Reconstruction era, however, was that progressive voices, including the realistic novel, not only helped discredit the abolitionist legacy, but also conceded the central conservative argument that social discrimination was unavoidable." (Kenneth W. Warren, *Black & White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994, 108.)

and attraction underlying race relations have a history as old as the country; and successive institutional arrangements resulting from particular historical circumstances have each rested on their peculiar myths. What is true is that the New South myth perfectly complemented the post-Reconstruction search for a new *modus operandi* in race relations and came to be the intellectual and moral foundation of the Jim Crow system of the twentieth century.<sup>342</sup>

In his explanation of the Southern Myth, Gaston takes race relationships as the cornerstone that would lead to the New South's combination of apparent "equality" in a segregated society. Indeed, "although the conditions of life were different, the race problem would continue to cause Southern leaders to reconcile incompatible allegiances with ingenious rationalizations and paradoxical beliefs" (Gaston, 119).<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1970, 223. What Gaston calls the myth of the New South has been called the Old South, the Southern myth, or the Lost Cause. For a more recent historical analysis of the New South see, Howard N. Rabinowitz, *The First New South: 1865-1920*. Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1992; and the very documented by Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. For an analysis of the rhetorical uses of the New South's discourses, and their effects in private property in connection to *Absalom, Absalom!* see Rebecca Saunders, "On Lamentation and the Redistribution of Possessions: Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and the New South." *Modern Fiction Studies* 42.4 (1996): 730-62. For a study on the influence of the New South's creed on the popular imagination, and its filtering in Faulkner's novels, see Peter Lurie, *Vision's Immanence. Faulkner, Film, and the Popular Imagination*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2004.

<sup>343</sup> The idea of an inherent paradox, which is reflected in many aspects of the Southern myth, is pointed out by many authors. See, for example, how F. Garvin Davenport Jr. explains it and how he relates it to the national young Union's project: "But the myth of Southern history, while based on these facts of separateness, was also to be used by Southerners to seek resolution for the central contradictions of the national mythology—how Jefferson's white yeomen could retain their innocence in a society that was being invaded by the machine and the city and in which there was already present the alien figure of the Negro. This myth suggested that the South, because of its experience of defeat and humiliation, had developed a vision of history, a strength of character and a sense of moral responsibility which made it alone of all the national regions strong enough to reconcile industrialism and the Negro with the Jeffersonian vision. Or, if reconciliation was impossible, the South would exile itself from the threatening forces and take its stand alone" (*The Myth of Southern History*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1967, 11). This idea sets the framework that will include Faulkner's concerns in *Absalom, Absalom!* and in most of his work. Davenport documents the different reactions that are somehow representative of this mythical perspective of the South after the Civil War. This documentation notes

Thus, the New South still preserved the main inner contradictions upon which the slaveholding Old South had been founded, even though it had regulated them in practice through several mechanisms, which made the paradoxical constituents less apparent.<sup>344</sup> I am thinking here of the contradiction inherent in the practice of miscegenation. How could a society initially divided between free and unfree labour, and afterwards only on a racial basis, countenance an intrinsically pervasive practice that blurred the dichotomy upon which it was not only founded but maintained between slaves and free people, between blacks and whites? How could a slave look white? And furthermore, how could the son of a master be a slave? These questions were passed on to the New South, albeit transformed. As an example of this paradox, when social, political, and economic inequality was based solely on racial discrimination, even then some states did not dare to define legally who was a “Negro”: there were just too many mulattoes, too many people whose appearance was white as the result of miscegenation. The very white feeling that those who were like you were classed as belonging to the other race simply eroded any legitimacy of the color line. When miscegenation yielded its most compelling provocations in the figures of the “passer” and the crossing of race and kinship (sons who were family but alien because they belonged to the other ‘race’), the contradiction reached its most visible form. This was famously presented by Frederick Douglass when he analyzed his condition as a slave and as the master’s son: he was the son of a white planter and shared his inheritance, but nevertheless was by law and in practice a slave submitted to the most onerous obligations.<sup>345</sup> Once the abolition of slavery dismantled the rules that determined who was a slave and who not, the contradiction of having sons that could be only part white yet also free, and

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the crucial issues of the myth as described by Davenport of the reconciliation and union, Southern uniqueness, Southern burden, and the theme of the Southern mission in the works of Woodrow Wilson, William Garrott Brow (which the author says anticipates Faulkner’s perspective on the myth), Frederick Jackson Turner, and Thomas Dixon.

<sup>344</sup> It is important to know the context of the historical antebellum South so as to better understand the issues that became the foundation of the Myth of the Old South. For this purpose, Louis D. Rubin, Jr.’s study *The Edge of the Swamp: A Study in the Literature and Society of the Old South* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1989) is very useful; for a counterpoint in the literature of the South, see Paul Christian Jones’ *Unwelcomed Voices: Subversive Fiction in the Antebellum South*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2005.

<sup>345</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. 1845. New York, Signet Classics, 2005, 21-2.

eventually equal in rights, became unbearably present.<sup>346</sup> Ultimately, the white New South would find new ways to conceal these contradictions from public eyes until the fallacy underlying the new Jim Crow rules could not be maintained any longer.<sup>347</sup> In this light, we

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<sup>346</sup> Carlo Ginzburg analyzes the development of the idea of the myth historically. In his tracing of the relationship between politics and myth he quotes a passage by Nietzsche's famous work *The Birth of Tragedy* to explain how did he understand the myth and how he considered myths were revealed in a society. Here is the passage he quotes, which bears strong parallelisms with the slaveholding South in general lines, and Ginzburg's commentaries:  
"En *El nacimiento de la tragedia* (1872), Nietzsche lo explicó de manera muy cruda y muy lúcida:

Todo el mundo moderno está prendido de las redes de la cultura alejandrina [...] Obsérvese con atención: la cultura alejandrina, para poder existir de modo duradero, necesita una clase de esclavos; pero al negar, en su concepción optimista de la existencia, la necesidad de tal clase, se dirige gradualmente, cuando se agote el efecto de sus hermosas palabras seductoras y garantizadoras de la 'dignidad del hombre' y de la 'dignidad del trabajo', a una horrible destrucción. Nada hay más terrible que una clase bárbara de esclavos que haya aprendido a considerar su existencia como una injusticia y que pretenda vengarse no sólo por sí, sino por todas las generaciones. ¿Quién osará, ante tan amenazadas tormentas, apelar con ánimo firme a nuestras muertas y estancadas religiones, que están degeneradas hasta en sus cimientos? De este modo, el mito, presupuesto necesario de toda religión, ya está paralizado por doquier, y en ciertos ambientes ha sido sustituido por aquel espíritu optimista que antes hemos señalado como germen destructivo de nuestra sociedad.

Estas palabras, escritas inmediatamente después de la Comuna parisina, dejaron una señal duradera . . . Nietzsche sacaba las conclusiones de las vicisitudes históricas que hemos recapitulado hasta ahora. En la antigua Grecia, el mito contribuyó al control de la sociedad justificando, por una parte, la ordenación jerárquica y agitando por otra la amenaza de las penas ultraterrenas. El cristianismo heredó esta doble función. Pero tras la Reforma la situación se había deteriorado. Ya no bastaba la religión para tener a raya al proletariado (los esclavos modernos); hacían falta nuevos mitos. Nietzsche soñaba el renacimiento del mito alemán y pensaba en Wagner, a quien está dedicado *El nacimiento de la tragedia*. Pero el renacimiento del mito estaba presente desde hacía tiempo, y no sólo en Alemania. Fue el patriotismo, y no la religión, la que movilizó a las masas que durante años mataron y se hicieron matar en los campos de batalla europeos." (*Ojazos de madera: Nueve reflexiones sobre la distancia*. Barcelona: Península, 2000, 80)

<sup>347</sup> It is interesting here to mention Martin Christadler's opinion that such positive elements as the plantation, the chivalric gentleman on horseback and *pater familias*, and the pastoral nostalgic view configure the Southern myth, meanwhile he reasonably attributes to the "myth of Nature" the two other elements I have introduced as part of the Southern myth, those of "blood—the medium in which all creatures are interrelated, whose egalitarian, anarchic potential is domesticated by society, by the heaviest of taboos and sanctions: the primacy of the father who defines social identity; the institutionalizing of female sexuality in marriage; the prohibition of incest; and the suppression of the ultimate subversion, miscegenation" ("William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*: History, Consciousness and Transcendence." *Faulkner and History*. Ed. Javier Coy and Michel Gresset. Salamanca: Ediciones U de Salamanca, 1986, 159). I certainly agree with the superposition of

might see miscegenation resting at the core of the Myth of the South and probably shaping the contradiction or the tension that seems to lie within any cosmology.

In this chapter I will address the persistent problem of amalgamation and its consequences as a condensation of race relations in the South, as it occurred in history and it appeared in literature, which helped the Southern myth to endure. By analyzing mainly the contradictory axis of race and kinship, and the tension between racial codes and reality, however, I would not want to suggest this is the only relevant aspect of the Myth of the South. Other pertinent dichotomies, such as memory and history, rural life and urban life, pre-industrial societies and industrial ones, also contribute to it and, in fact, are so imbricated that they will constantly come up in my discussion.<sup>348</sup> However, and apart from the fact that racial issues are so central in the Myth, I focus on them because they represent the essential conflict in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Arguably, *Absalom, Absalom!* establishes the Myth of the South as a framework for the story of Thomas Sutpen. From the very beginning of the novel, the narrative situation in the conversation between Miss Rosa and Quentin Compson conjures the same atmosphere where storytellers retell the oral myths that shape the origins of the world that the oral community inhabits. In such a manner emerges the story of Thomas Sutpen and his figure: “Then in the long unamaze Quentin

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these elements as suggested by the author, yet I think that the “myth” probably works very much as a dual structure such as Bhabha’s stereotype and very much in the direction taken by Lévi-Strauss in his analysis. It is because of its counterpart creating conflict that we understand the significance and dynamics of the myth. Although this idea merits further study, it is beyond the reach of this chapter.

<sup>348</sup> It is especially relevant for the exploration of these contradicting issues in William Faulkner’s work, Karl F. Zender, *The Crossing of the Ways: William Faulkner, the South, and the Modern World*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 1989; see also his article on the representation of sound in relation to the transformation of the South, “Faulkner and the Power of Sound.” *PMLA* 99.1 (January 1984): 89-108. A very valuable document that exposes these conflicting issues from the perspective of white Southerners is the classic work of W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*. 1941. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. For a recent analysis of the discourses of labor (including mostly slavery and industry) see Charles Hannon’s chapter dedicated to *Absalom, Absalom!* in his book, *Faulkner and the Discourses of Culture*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2005. See also for the same theme, Richard Godden’s well-received book, *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South’s Long Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pointific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*.<sup>349</sup> The telling of the origins, which are here explicitly given a divine character that will be referred to later, occurs within the exercise of remembering, and the physical and psychological involvement it requires so that the feeling that "[t]he past is not dead. It's not even past" is highly present.<sup>350</sup> The mythical narrative situation welcomes the synchronic relation Quentin establishes between Sutpen's past story and his own, producing a communion between these "two Quentins":

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, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was—the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage, like this.  
(6)

By means of Quentin's thoughts, "*It's because she wants it told he thought so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the War: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth*" (8), the novel establishes the relationship between the story of Sutpen and the defeat of the Civil War, which constitutes the end of the mythical South, the Lost Cause. In addition, Quentin's thoughts establish the repetitive mode of the myth as the structural pattern of the novel in the double sense that the story is repeated by several narrative voices, and that within each account there is a permanent

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<sup>349</sup> As in the previous chapter, all quotations come from the authorized and revised edition of *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: The Library of America, 1990, 6.

<sup>350</sup> William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*. 1951. *Novels 1942-1954: Go Down, Moses, Intruder in the Dust, Requiem for a Nun, A Fable*. Ed. Joseph Blotner and Noel Polk. New York: The Library of America, 1994, 535.

repetition of the events. Since Time has stopped in many ways, as the thirst for retelling it reminds us, the feeling of community is reinforced and embodied in each of its members. Indeed, "Quentin had grown up with that; the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad. His childhood was full of them; his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth" (9). This commonwealth has the power to condense Time in their retelling of stories, as the frame narrator recalls when focusing on Quentin: "It was a day of listening too—the listening, the hearing in 1909 even yet mostly that which he already knew since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells had rung on that Sunday morning in 1833" (25).<sup>351</sup>

The myth of the Southern origins not only involves the idea of an original curse, but also the feeling that its persistence freezes every present, which produces both a narrative and life impression of repetition, as it is fathomed when Miss Rosa says

Yes, fatality and curse on the South and on our family as though because some ancestor of ours had elected to establish his descent in a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it, even if it had not rather been our family, our father's progenitors, who had incurred the curse long years before and had been coerced by Heaven into establishing itself in the land and the time already cursed. (16)

While the mythical framework is set at the beginning of the novel and emphasized in the creation of a perceptibly Southern atmosphere (in which nature plays, as in all of Faulkner's fiction, a major role in creating an identity for the subject and the land); by the end, the frame narrator's underlining of it is reinforced, though in its most simplistic function, by Shreve. Certainly, if Quentin lives the myth and should attempt to transmit it to other people and generations, this is not the case with the Canadian Shreve. Shreve assumes certain superficial clichés and the most painful issues entailed in the myth in order to use them principally as a guideline for finding out the "shape to fill a lack" in Sutpen's enigmatic story, rather than to understand a community whose historical ways of feeling cannot, in the end, be fully

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<sup>351</sup> On the peculiar functioning of time in the Myth in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, see Patricia Drechsel Tobin's chapter "The Shadowy Attenuation of Time: William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*? *Time and the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978.

explained.<sup>352</sup> Shreve's association with the Myth of the South is first presented in his insistent questioning of Quentin: "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all" (145). Near the conclusion of Shreve and Quentin's telling, Shreve indicates clearly the rigid, codified frame in which he has fitted the story:

"All right. But let me know if you want the coats. Jesus, if I was going to have to spend nine months in this climate, I would sure hate to have come from the South. Maybe I wouldn't come from the South anyway, even if I could stay there. Wait. Listen. I'm not trying to be funny, smart. I just want to understand it if I can and I dont know how to say it better. Because it's something my people haven't got. Or if we have got it, it all happened long ago across the water and so now there aint anything to look at every day to remind us of it. We dont live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) and bullets in the dinning room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? a kind of entailed birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, so that forevermore as long as your children's children produce children you wont be anything but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett's charge at Manassas?"

"Gettysburg," Quentin said. "You cant understand it. You would have to be born there."

"Would I then?" Quentin did not answer. "Do you understand it?"

"I dont know," Quentin said. "Yes, of course I understand it." They breathed in the darkness. After a moment Quentin said: "I dont know." (296)

To Shreve the South is not the contradictory experience of Quentin, but just a set of stereotypes, the tale he has heard about the region. As Thadious Davis notes "With his [Shreve's] mythologizing it becomes even more apparent that *Absalom* is as much about the creation and perpetuation, acceptance and rejection of certain myths of the South

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<sup>352</sup> For the use of Faulkner's words in this sense, see Theresa M. Towner's major contribution to the study of racial issues in Faulkner, *Faulkner on the Color Line: The Later Novels*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000, 23.

as it is about the needs out of which those myths materialize and are made concrete.”<sup>353</sup>

Furthermore, Shreve’s witty and skeptical mind sarcastically picks the most hurtful elements contained in the myth in a way that by the end of the novel he confronts Quentin with its own contradictions. Indeed, as a way of concluding the story Shreve foresees the spread of miscegenation and its biological outcome of the disappearance of the white race, and white supremacy. When Shreve makes explicit the aforementioned contradiction between kinship and race through the “mediating device” of the mulatto, borrowing Lévi-Strauss concept, Quentin finds himself, in his complex identification with the South as the region to which he belongs, forced to solve this mythical and historical contradiction prompted by Shreve’s question: “Why do you hate the South?” (311) Finding it impossible to respond, Quentin brings out the anguish of the irresolution that still lies at the heart of the Southern search for an identity, the struggle between the idealistic image of the South and what has come to be named “the Burden of Southern History.”<sup>354</sup> As Davis states, that is

The virtual impossibility of personal, individual wholeness in a fragmented, racially divided world. . . . There is, he repeats in these novels, no ready answer to the South’s or the southerner’s dilemma. As long as Quentin cannot face the inner reality of his own existence, he cannot possibly resolve his own, or his society’s, dilemma. (234)

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<sup>353</sup> Thadious M. Davis, *Faulkner’s “Negro”: Art and the Southern Context*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1983, 229. Since Davis focuses principally on the Myth of the “Negro,” further references to her work will appear in this chapter. See also her more recent study, *Games of property. Law, Race, Gender, and Faulkner’s Go Down, Moses*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003.

<sup>354</sup> As a major work dealing with this topic, see C. Vann Woodward’s classic collection of essays *The Burden of Southern History*. Opinions vary on what was Faulkner’s perspective in relation to the Old South’s curse. For the importance of the author and his proximity, I quote here Robert Penn Warren’s words: “The old order, he clearly indicates, did *not* satisfy human needs, did *not* afford justice, and therefore was ‘accursed’ and held the seeds of its own ruin. But the point is this: the old order, even with its bad conscience and confusion of mind, even as it failed to live up to its ideal, cherished the concept of justice. Even in terms of the curse, the old order as opposed to the new order (in so far as the new order is equated with Snopesism) allowed the traditional man to define himself as human by setting codes, ideas of virtue, however mistaken” (“William Faulkner,” *Modern American Fiction: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. A. Walton Litz. London: Oxford UP, 1963, 156.)

Quentin's emotional and painful response accounts for this in the most synthetic way: "I dont hate it,' Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; 'I dont hate it,' he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*" (311) For B. G. Till Betz, "Quentin's ambivalence to the mythos of the South reflects both his psychological turmoil and the complex contradictions inherent in any myth itself."<sup>355</sup> Indeed, it is precisely the ambivalence of this statement that contains the contradiction, which invites the perpetuation of the myth. As this last sentence of the novel shows, the text as a form reproduces the inner dynamics of perpetuation through the retelling of the myth. It is this repetition that makes Quentin argue that this is not a "*was* but *again*," which brings Noel Polk to go even further, since "the vital force that through the green fuse drives, drives us forward, not into was or again but into possibility, the most terrifying and exhilarating of frontiers."<sup>356</sup>

This brief analysis of the Myth of the South, both as a structural pattern for the novel as well as a historical framework, helps to elucidate its function when considered in its internal use in *Absalom, Absalom!* and so its proper narrative use. In contrast to the code of the "Adventure novel" in the Patusan section of *Lord Jim*, the Myth of the South functions as a frame for the novel as a whole. In fact, nothing is left outside its influence. The myth of the South is incarnated both in Thomas Sutpen and Quentin Compson, but presently experienced by Quentin, whose mind filters the many conversations that take place in the novel, from his initial conversation with Rosa Coldfield until his conversation with Shreve at the end. It is not arbitrarily that his outcry closes the novel. This makes the "contained units" of the myth not fully broken by their contrast to other voices outside the myth. If Shreve does not embrace the myth, he nevertheless simplistically appeals to some of the stereotypes, and the painstaking issues which do reside in it, albeit in much more complex ways. Quentin's

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<sup>355</sup> B. G. Till Betz, "*Absalom, Absalom!* And *The Sound and the Fury*: Quentin's failure to create a Mythic reconstruction." *University of Mississippi Studies in English* 11-12 (1993-5): 441. See also Richard Gray's focus on this passage to contrast Faulkner to other Southern writers' treatment of the Old Plantation motif in *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1977. 197-256.

<sup>356</sup> Noel Polk, "'The Force that through the Green Fuse Drives': Faulkner and the Greening of American History." *Faulkner in America*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1998. Ed. Joseph R. Urgo and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2001, 62.

restrained last words stress this considerably more intricate structure of the myth.

The associations of myth with narrative and history seen in *Absalom, Absalom!* are as old as the idea of the myth itself. Furthermore, as also seen in this novel, the relationship between myth and politics and/or history, parallels that of the myth and foundational narratives, including religious texts such as the Bible. These connections in the understanding of myth are hard to define, and indeed go further beyond the purpose of this chapter, for which the mere acknowledgement of the myth as a framework should be sufficient. However, I want to make a few remarks about these relationships and their relevance in *Absalom, Absalom!*

Carlo Ginzburg has traced historically the idea of the myth in its multilayered nature. He begins the relationship between myth and politics by quoting Plato's third book of *The Republic*, where Socrates observes that "la mentira es inútil para los dioses, y para los hombres es útil solo a modo de medicina" (389b). From this clause Socrates derives a general one: "De ahí que los jefes de la ciudad, y nunca a los demás, les está permitido mentir a causa de los enemigos o de los ciudadanos, en beneficio de la propia ciudad" (61). While the myth was early associated with a "lie," and its political use for the common good, Ginzburg provides evidence of the understanding of religion as a permissible lie required to organize society in the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Modern times. When in Modern times religious systems of belief start to crack, Ginzburg refers to the emergence of nationalist credos as a new form of myth. After providing examples until Machiavelli's time, Ginzburg states that

Tales contraposiciones, formuladas a lo largo de dos milenios a partir de posturas muy distintas o claramente opuestas, parten de un postulado más o menos abiertamente declarado: que la mayoría de los hombres, dominados por las pasiones y la ignorancia, sólo pueden ser tenidos a raya gracias a la religión o a los mitos introducidos por los pocos sabios 'para imponer la obediencia de las leyes y por motivos de utilidad' (Aristóteles). (65)

Within the Western religious tradition, the Bible is the Christian foundational text. The Bible functions in *Absalom, Absalom!* as the myth of reference to that of the South, as it is reflected in Rosa's above mentioned sentence: "creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be*

*Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be Light*” (6); and also by the very title of the novel which explicitly refers to the sacred text. From J. Hillis Miller’s point of view, “the novel constantly reinforces the notion that patterns of belief and action ineluctably perpetuate themselves from generation to generation in blind repetitions. These repetitions are like the way the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* repeat the biblical story of David, Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom without being shown even to be aware of it.”<sup>357</sup>

Apart from the exploration of the links between the stories of Absalom and Sutpen’s children, what interests me in particular is the fact that what has been called “the myth of the South” has been written and told many times in different ways, yet we cannot provide a specific text that would function as “a narrative” of this myth of foundation. By contrast, the Bible does function as a model narrative for the myth of foundation and therefore provides Faulkner with a framework in terms not only of the story told, but also the narrative discourse in which it is expressed.<sup>358</sup> There is in this generic textual reference a resemblance to *Lord Jim*’s relationship with the genre of the Adventure Novel. But what is remarkable for us now is that, in actuality, there is a special relationship between politics/history, myth, and religion that we should bear in mind.

Following this historical/political understanding, the Myth of the South seems to function as a setting for the historical dimension of Sutpen’s story—which has a collective symbolic meaning that makes it worth telling as a version of the myth—as well as it acknowledges the legendary origin of some of its enigmatic points. Its legendary aspect when inserted in a novel might help to build the fictional nature of stories told in literature and, consequently, enable the transitions from

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<sup>357</sup> J. Hillis Miller, “Ideology and Topography in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Faulkner and Ideology*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1992. Ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995, 268.

<sup>358</sup> For the study of Religion and Religious texts in Faulkner’s fiction, see Timothy P. Caron, *Struggles over the Word: Race and Religion in O’Connor, Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright*. Macon: Mercer UP, 2000. See also, Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie, eds., *Faulkner and Religion*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1989. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, c.1991; John V. Hagopian, “The Biblical Background of *Absalom, Absalom!*” *William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!: A Critical Casebook*. Ed. Elisabeth Mulhenfeld. New York: Garland, 1984. 131-4; and less specific, Charles R. Wilson, *Judgment and Grace in Dixie: Southern Faiths from Faulkner to Elvis*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1995.

history to fiction while maintaining one foot in each realm. The Myth as a framework, therefore, would account for Shreve's undermining of the "truth" of the story for the sake of its verisimilitude, its credibility. Both myth and fiction will invite a story which is historically grounded to partake "of that logic—and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity—horror or pleasure or amazement—depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale." (18)<sup>359</sup>

If the nature of the myth stands between language and history—or, in other words, literature and history—in its perpetuating dynamics resides the historical process of remembering and, therefore, the complex relationship between memory and history. Faulkner masterfully elaborates it to fascinate subsequent generations of writers all over the world, including Juan Benet in Spain. Despite the difficulties that such an issue entails in Faulkner's work, what is apparent is that repetition, associative methods, the expression of contradictions, and distortion of events and perspectives, are inherent to the act of remembering and thus shape, like the myth, the very narrative texture of the novels. In *Absalom, Absalom!* the major motif of the Myth of the South, accomplishes the same function.<sup>360</sup>

This chapter aims to argue that, similarly to *Lord Jim*, the Myth of the South shapes the framework through which race is represented in *Absalom, Absalom!* Since at the core of the Myth of the South lies the racial conflict in the region from its very foundation, what Davis refers to as the "Myth of the 'Negro'" mainly defines the presence of African Americans in the novel. Indeed, the stereotypical representation of African Americans is reinforced by its subjection to the myth as narrative framework. Since the Myth of the South is not only white but it lays claim to white supremacy, racial representation is necessarily

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<sup>359</sup> For a discussion on the location of the myth between the terrains of truth and untruth, see again Ginzburg's essay, especially the first and last pages.

<sup>360</sup> Juan Benet's most relevant elaboration of memory and time in the novel is found in his greatest novel *Volverás a Región*. For a splendid analysis of the interrelation of narrative treatment of time and memory, see his essay "William Faulkner." *Una biografía literaria*. Madrid: Cuatro, 2007. 63-82.

subjected to the codified racial discourse.<sup>361</sup> Yet not all the presupposed racial stereotypes can be restricted to a single reading. Rather, in deploying the stereotypes as narrative forms, Faulkner uses very skilled processes to combine them, which endorse and simultaneously break them in such a way that, ultimately, their formal working as contradictory ambivalent forms is disclosed.

Racial stereotypes can be better understood if to the myth of the “Negro” we add the “myth of family relations.” In other words, the heart of the conflict and of the contradiction is made apparent through the intersection of kinship and race, as we are going to see further along. Therefore, the myth as a structure allows us to recognize the contradictory issues which interact with race in the Southern myth and which provide the most accurate approach to the complex codifying of racial stereotypes in the South.

To conclude with this aspect in *Absalom, Absalom!*, the Myth of the South in its function as a framework for the novel not only embodies in a microcosmic story the transitions from history to fiction, and introduces memory as the chief narrative performance, but also deeply affects racial representation in the novel. With regards to this, the myth together with the subjection of the representation of race to the white mind’s racial stereotypes of the “Negro,” provides a structure of contraposition and duality in which aspects like whiteness and miscegenation play its contrasting functions in order to delineate the complex Southern dilemma of race relations. Seen from this angle, the Myth of the South in *Absalom, Absalom!* not only already contains the ambivalence in racial representation in the novel, but it even provides a form for it: there is no solution to the dilemma between “I hate” and “I don’t hate it,” between the idealization of the Old South and the Burden of Southern History. It is precisely at this point, and significantly when we take into account the narrators’ context of 1936, that we fathom how the framework of the myth condenses the crisis of the New South at the present time of the telling, and prefigures its forthcoming equivalent in Faulkner’s times.

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<sup>361</sup> For an overview of the American racial myth in Faulkner’s work, see Margaret Walker Alexander, “Faulkner & Race.” *The Maker and the Myth*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference 1977. Ed. Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1978. 105-121. Also, with regards to the use of the codified discourse, it has not been an easy issue to deal with among critics, as we can see from the recently published reflections by Houston A. Baker, Jr. in his *I Don’t Hate the South: Reflections on Faulkner, Family, and the South*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.

## 5. 2. The representation of the ‘peculiar institution’: functions of slavery in the novel

Several tropes can be distinguished in relation to the representation of race in *Absalom, Absalom!* the appearance of which in the novel is subdued to the mythical frame in the aforementioned historical terms. These motifs shall be analyzed in relation to the correspondent racial stereotypes of the times, as well as in their modification resulting from their use in narrative fiction.<sup>362</sup> Like the study of racial stereotypes in *Lord Jim*, inquiring into the historical context from which the stereotypes arise, along with their codification on the level of both artistic and social discourse, shall prepare us to gather their internal narrative functions which make their meaning in the fiction much more complex.

An inherent component of the Southern myth, slavery constitutes an axis of the context into which Sutpen’s story is set for many reasons that I shall explore.<sup>363</sup> Slavery misleadingly appears at first sight in *Absalom, Absalom!* as part of the setting, something that claims our attention more for its “invisibility” in the development of the story than because of its actual depiction. Of course, as a novel that revisits the plantation literature, slavery is part of the social and economic system it refers, and thus the novel can be read from that point of view, as Richard Godden does.<sup>364</sup> However, paying attention to the

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<sup>362</sup> For the construction of racial stereotypes in the United States, see George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. 1971. Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1987; Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise & Demise of an American Jester*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986; Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of African and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991; and Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1998.

<sup>363</sup> For an excellent and rigorous introduction to slavery in the United States, see especially, Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery. 1619-1877*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 1995; and Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*. Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2003. For an overview of race relations in the United States, see Ronald H. Bayor, ed., *Race and Ethnicity in America: A Concise History*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.

<sup>364</sup> The novel not only revisits the plantation novel but it is nourished by a plantation diary that has recently been found. The news of this finding appeared in the article by Patricia Cohen “Faulkner Link to Plantation Diary Discovered” when this dissertation was being edited on Thursday, February 10 in the *New York Times* although a preview of the findings by Sally Wolff appeared in her article “William

slaves themselves as characters, we might consider them as part of the background. They never appear on their own but always accompanying whites, mainly Sutpen, but also other characters such as the Coldfields or the Compsons. Many critics share Ulfried Reichardt's assertion that "the perspective of free African Americans, and, more dramatically, of the slaves (Sutpen's 'wild niggers') is almost completely left out. . . . The function of Faulkner's discourse, then, is not at all to represent the slaves' experience, but rather to show how the slaves' presence *affected* white people."<sup>365</sup> If in this particular motif Faulkner seems to share the traditional perspective of the plantation novel and white writers on the South in general (apart from the sympathetic attempts to represent the slave point of view in white-written antebellum abolitionist texts), slavery is not told by an authorial narrator but is mainly filtered by two narrators, Rosa Coldfield and Mr Compson.<sup>366</sup> Rosa's descriptions of Sutpen's slaves constrain them to the traditional stereotype of the "wild niggers." In her first recurrent description in the novel of Thomas Sutpen's entrance in Jefferson in 1833, mediated in a sort of free indirect discourse by the frame narrator, we find the connection between the demonic perspective Miss Rosa attributes to Sutpen and the wilderness of his slaves:

Out of a quiet thunderchapel he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard, with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk upright like men in attitudes wild and reposed (6)<sup>367</sup>

This insistence on the "bestial" aspect and character of the slaves corresponds to the town's perception of them, which in its racial

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Faulkner and the Ledgers of History." *The Southern Literary Journal* 42.1 (Fall 2009): 1-16.

<sup>365</sup> Ulfried Reichardt, "Perceiving and Representing Slavery and 'Race' Through Time: William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 42.4 (1997): 621.

<sup>366</sup> For an introduction to the plantation novel that offers selected further reading, see John M. Grammer, "Plantation Fiction." *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. Ed. Richard Gray and Owen Robinson. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. 58-75. See also, Richard Godden's chapter dedicated to Faulkner in the same volume, "William Faulkner." 436-453.

<sup>367</sup> References that fix slaves as "wild" and as "beasts" abound in the following pages: "wild blacks" (6), "a herd of wild beasts" (12), "those wild negroes" (16), "two of his wild negroes" (23), "two black beasts" (23).

imagination animalizes them in both linking them to nature and to what were considered animal instincts such as intrinsic violence or their nakedness. Smelling bad, and the frightening perception of the slave's eyes and teeth are features commonly highlighted by both Miss Colfield and Mr Compson in the first two chapters. Mr Compson narrates Grandfather Compson's first sight of the slaves in the wagon brought by Sutpen when he has already purchased the land where Sutpen's Hundred will lie: "Apparently it was only by sheer geographical hap that Sutpen passed through town at all, pausing only long enough for someone (not General Compson) to look beneath the wagon hood and into a black tunnel filled with still eyeballs and smelling like a wolfden" (28).

The terrifying impression of these "wild negroes" in contrast to the tame ones in Jefferson, will develop into "the legend of Sutpen's wild negroes" (28) which was

gradually back to town, brought by the men who would ride out to watch what was going on, who began to tell how Sutpen would take stand beside the game trail with the pistols and sent the negroes to drive the swamp like a pack of hounds; it was they who told how during that first summer and fall the negroes did not even have (or did not use) blankets to sleep in, even before the coon-hunter Akers claimed to have walked one of them out of the absolute mud like a sleeping alligator and screamed just in time. (29)

It is clear, as Davis explains in his comments on this passage, that "the view of blacks in this less emotional account is still that of primitive men close to institutional communication with animals and nature" (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 192). The collective image of slaves is hardly there for the sake of representing them as individuals in the novel; yet when represented as individuals their description is also filtered through the white haunted perspective. This is the case with Rosa Coldfield's portrait of the slave that rides her sister Ellen's carriage to the church: "on the front seat the face and teeth of the wild negro" (18), "in his Christian clothes looking exactly like a performing tiger in a linen duster and a top hat" (19). Their animalization also supplies the linguistic ingredient in racial discourse: the language of blacks is the language of animals, not comprehensible, non-communicating: "It was the negro now, who in the act of passing another carriage spoke to that team too as well as to his own—something without words, not needing words probably, in that tongue in which they slept in the mud

of that swamp and brought here out of whatever dark swamp he had found them in and brought them here” (19). Yet Mr Compson’s distancing from the black tongue’s stereotype works as the first counterpoint that reveals the misjudging that lies at the basis of any racial code. Indeed, he observes that Sutpen spoke to his slave “in that tongue which even now a good part of the country did not know was a civilised language” (46).

Amongst the multiple motifs that construct fear of slave revolt in the novel—splendidly traced by Richard Godden—in the detailed description of this just mentioned slave character we find the first insinuation of the violence against masters inherent in slavery. Seeing that Ellen Coldfield and Thomas Sutpen’s marriage ceremony is strongly rejected by Jefferson’s white population, which does not attend but gathers outside the church in order to witness the spectacle of a failure, Mr Compson tells how the tension rises owing to the threatening gesture of Ellen’s aforementioned slave: “Perhaps the changing light itself as she turned and saw one of the negroes, his torch raised and in the act of springing toward the crowd, the faces, when Sutpen spoke to him” (46). In Mr Compson’s reflection that “there were doubtless pistols in the crowd; certainly knives: the negro would not have lived ten seconds if he had sprung” (47), the issue of slave revolt works as a “proleptic gesture” in the narrative, not only of the “negro revolt” that Sutpen put down in the West Indies, but also of the Haitian revolution itself and of the threats and violence between slaves and masters, a division maintained yet transformed in the New South by the color line.<sup>368</sup>

However, the confrontation of slaves and masters, of black and white people, has its outcome, suggested by Lévi-Strauss, in the fact that both counterparts might resemble each other. The opposition of white and black images is accompanied by images that virtually foreshadow racial contact as performed through scenes of touch and the offspring of miscegenation. This foreshadowing is embedded in the presentation of slavery in the novel. A couple of examples would suffice to illuminate this. Rosa Colfield explains that when the slave rides Ellen’s carriage to the wedding she has the feeling that Sutpen’s face is “exactly like the negro’s save for the teeth (because of his beard, doubtless)” (19). Sutpen’s association with the slaves’ animality reaches its peak in Sutpen’s fights with his slaves. Miss Rosa tells that

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<sup>368</sup> Recall here Simmons’ description of ‘proleptic gestures’ in *Lord Jim*, in note 120.

in the centre of an improvised ring “two of his wild negroes [were] fighting, naked, fighting not like white men fight, with rules and weapons, but like negroes fight to hurt one another quick and bad,” and then suddenly

Ellen seeing not the two black beasts she had expected to see but instead a white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gouging at one another’s eyes as if their skins should not only have been the same color but should have been covered with fur too. . . . Yes. That is what Ellen saw: her husband and the father of her children standing there naked and panting and bloody to the waist and the negro just fallen evidently, lying at his feet and bloody too save that on the negro it merely looked like grease or sweat. (23)

Sutpen’s resemblance to his slaves here accounts for both his sin of not respecting racial boundaries and conventions, and unveils the underlying and apparently contradictory fact that the merging of racial boundaries, even in procreation, is a reality.<sup>369</sup>

On the other hand, there is one relevant distinction pointed out here which constitutes one of the ways the South had tried historically to distinguish its own slaves, bred in the paternalistic atmosphere of the “peculiar institution,” from those more extreme forms of slavery down in the Caribbean. When the town sees Sutpen’s slaves they deduce that “he [Sutpen] was no younger son sent out from some old quiet country like Virginia or Carolina with the surplus negroes to take up new land, because anyone could look at those negroes to take up new land, because anyone could look at those negroes of his and tell that they may have come (and probably did) from a much older country than Virginia or Carolina but wasn’t a quiet one” (13). The contrast to Southern slaves is made clear when they are described as “tame.”<sup>370</sup> This appears, for instance, when Ellen decides to substitute

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<sup>369</sup> Louise Westling analyzes the connection between Sutpen’s slaves, the land and interracial relations in her article, “Thomas Sutpen’s Marriage to the Dark Body of the Land.” *Faulkner and the Natural World*. Ed. Donald Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1999. 126-142.

<sup>370</sup> In his article “Negro Character as Seen by White Authors” (*The Journal of Negro Education* 2.2, April 1933, 179-203) Sterling A. Brown analysed the stereotypes of the “Negro” that appear in the literature by white authors. He distinguishes between the “Contented Slave” (which corresponds to what we have called here the ‘tame slave’); “the Wretched Freedman,” “the Comic Negro,” “The tragic Mulatto,” the “Local Color Negro,” and “the Exotic Primitive,” most of which appear in *Absalom, Absalom!* as we will see.

the “wild man” who rides the carriage for a “tame stableboy” (21). This contrast underlies the argument used by slaveholders in the South in order to maintain slavery, thus exposing a flaw, seen through Southern eyes, in the model of plantation of Sutpen’s Hundred.<sup>371</sup> It is therefore not strange that all the slaves on his plantation will join the Union Army and flee from the house instead of remaining loyal and grateful to their masters.

By opposing Sutpen’s slaves to the Southern ones, the real threat and the myth of Haiti as the symbol of slave revolt are set in contrast to a more peaceful South that relies on the nobleness of the dearest slave, recalling the long-lasting debate in racist discourse on the inner character of the “negro,” brilliantly represented in Herman Melville’s novella *Benito Cereno*, contemporaneous with the events of Sutpen’s life.<sup>372</sup> Along with this most clear example of the debate over these two kinds of slaves, as they were considered at the time, the depiction of Virginian Southern slaves appears later in the narrative, when Quentin describes Sutpen’s childhood marked by class and racial stigma, and the social burden he suffered when he was banned from entering the planter’s mansion through the main door. Quentin’s description reports grandfather’s telling of the fact and the utilization of stereotypes cannot be attributed to any of the narrators in particular. However, the portrayal of the Virginian planter’s slaves perfectly fits the racial codes. Sutpen first encounters a slave when his poor father is thrown out from a doggerly “by a huge bull of a nigger, the first black man, slave, they had ever seen who emerged with the old man over his shoulder like a sack of meal and his—the nigger’s—mouth loud with the laughing and full of teeth like tombstones” (186). The conflict between poor whites and the Virginian planter’s slaves will be analyzed more extensively below, but it is interesting to note here the issue of these slaves’ depiction in its meeting of the stereotypes. Slaves are individually addressed yet through the stereotypical images of the “monkey nigger” (192), their laughter, and the “balloon face” (192). These Virginian slaves represent the idea of the Southern slaves in contrast to Sutpen’s “wild niggers” since, as Philip Weinstein reminds us

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<sup>371</sup> For an extended analysis of Sutpen’s design, see Dirk Kuyk, Jr., *Sutpen’s Design: Interpreting Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!* Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1990.

<sup>372</sup> See an analysis of racial representation in “Benito Cereno” in Gloria Horsley-Maecham, “Bull of the Nile: Symbol, History, and Racial Myth in ‘Benito Cereno.’” *The New England Quarterly* 64.2 (1991): 225-242.

These blacks are dressed according to white code, seen acting in white-imposed roles (butlers, drivers, plantation laborers). They register as factota representing the will of the silent and invisible white master. From that angle they seem protected, guaranteed, ratified. Their laughter echoes as the indecipherable sign of their superior insertion in the social fabric, and it drives Sutpen and his kind mad.<sup>373</sup>

Details like these, placed normally as background for the story, allow Darwin Turner to assert that in the context of Yoknapatawpha “conspicuously missing from Faulkner’s depiction of slavery is any picture of physical brutality. . . . Faulkner’s refusal to depict brutality or to identify his region as violent” significantly contributes to his argument that “in Faulkner’s myth of slavery, the evil does not lie in the white men’s practice—with the noteworthy exception that I will discuss. The American practice in the South, he would have us believe, was paternalistic and kindly.”<sup>374</sup> The exceptional white practices that constitute the evil of slavery are, for the critic, “the moral horrors of sexual exploitation of Black women and the psychological repression of male mulattoes” (84). In a duality that can be regarded as the contradictory forces in the Southern myth, Turner concludes that “Faulkner’s presentation of slavery suffers from this duality of consciousness, which caused him to perceive the injustices of slavery but venerate the society which practiced it” (65).<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Philip M. Weinstein, “Diving into the Wreck: Faulknerian Practice and the Imagination of Slavery.” *The Faulkner Journal* 10.2 (Spring 1995): 39. For a psychological analysis of these slaves’ laughter, see Lee Jenkins, *Faulkner and Black-White Relations: A Psychoanalytic Approach*. New York: Columbia UP, 1981, 184-5.

<sup>374</sup> Darwin T. Turner, “Faulkner and Slavery.” *The South and Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, 1976. Ed. Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1977, 69 and 70. On the ideologies of paternalism and liberalism in this novel see Kevin Railey, “Paternalism and Liberalism: Contending Ideologies in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *The Faulkner Journal* 7.1/2 (Fall 1991/Spring 1992): 115-131. See Railey’s idea put into the larger context of Faulkner’s Mississippi for a deeper understanding of the impact and evolution of both ideologies in the South in his book, *Natural Aristocracy: History, Ideology, and the Production of William Faulkner*. Tuscaloosa and London: U of Alabama P, 1999.

<sup>375</sup> Douglass T. Miller elaborates a similar perspective when relating the Civil War, Slavery and Myth in Faulkner’s work: “In modifying and preserving the traditional moral code through Bayard, Faulkner has revised the chimerical picture of the Civil War and its heroes. However, the author seems to do this only reluctantly and the South of the popular imagination is never totally rejected. While Faulkner implies that the moral failings of the planter-aristocracy and the economic institution of slavery brought on the war, nevertheless, his planters retain their grandeur, sinning as gentlemen and fighting as heroes.” “Faulkner and the Civil War: Myth and Reality.” *American Quarterly* 15.2 (Summer 1963): 208. However much these authors

Returning to our point of interest, from the textual evidence and relations established above we can distinguish some of the narrative functions slavery accomplishes in *Absalom, Absalom!* First, Miss Rosa and Mr Compson's narrations of the slave society as a context for the story of Thomas Sutpen place the story in History, and locate the role of slaves on a secondary level of importance and yet as an integral part of Southern society. The mythical frame they are narrated in, Miss Rosa's demonization of Sutpen and all that belongs to him, and the racial discourse rooted in the white Southern mind of Jefferson combine with all their force to produce a highly stereotyped image of slaves, seen not only as slaves but mainly as "negroes." As Reichard's complex argument would have it,

The story that is reconstructed in the course of the novel is centered around the concepts of racial difference held by its protagonists, but is also refracted through the 'racial categories' that characterize the views of the reconstructing narrators. Thus, the reconstruction of Southern history in the novel, comprising slavery as a crucial factor, is represented as the intersection of two forms of alterity—between the present and the past *and* between white and black. (615)

Indeed, in their insistence on referring to the slaves as "negroes," Miss Rosa and Mr Compson help establish the color line that binds both the history of the Old South and the New South, and which allows the perpetuation of the myth. The fact that the time of the narrative (1936, when there is segregation and racism, though not slavery) is different from the time of the story (both during and after slavery) is a significant use of a narrative strategy to develop a line of continuity on a racial basis between the characters and the narrators who partake in the story and the storytelling of Sutpen's life.<sup>376</sup> It is thanks to this

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acknowledge the ambivalence, racial representation in Faulkner's novels has been extensively and heatedly discussed by many critics. One example of the disagreements over it is a conversation that took place in the same Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, and which appeared in the same volume, Shelby Foote, Darwin T. Turner and Evans Harrington, "Faulkner and Race." *The South and Faulkner's* 86-103.

<sup>376</sup> Furthermore, the effect of the racial menace is intensified by Faulkner's annotation that in Yoknapatawpha County blacks formed 60 per cent of the population in contrast to Lafayette County's 40 per cent the year Faulkner drew the map. In *Absalom's* narrators' storytelling time blacks outnumbered whites as they had at the moment of the outbreak of the Civil War. See this observation in Charles S. Aiken, "Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County: Geographical Fact into Fiction." *Geographical Review* 67.1 (1977): 1-21. For more details and an interesting

racial point of view in the matter of slavery that Thadious Davis can state that

Rosa's creation of the "wild niggers" is related to the larger implications of the novel. . . . Because of its intensity and obstinacy, Rosa's distorted vision of the slaves pervades the entire novel and operates as a psychological backdrop for Sutpen's rejection of Bon and his black blood. The struggle between father and son can take on colossal proportions with far-reaching historical and cultural consequences in part because Rosa has so effectively created a forceful, larger-than-life, demonic landscape for the action. (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 194)

Hence, the obstinate demonic racial landscape that historically pertains more to the imagery of racial discourse than to reality itself prepares the reader for the interpretation of the conflict in the narrative (Henry Sutpen's killing of Charles Bon) as a racial one. Throughout their lateral and their narrative descriptions, perceptions and references to slavery illuminate an invisible presence that will grow in importance as the novel develops to become the only possible explanation for Bon's murder and the downfall of Sutpen's Hundred. Rosa Coldfield's discourse is as much distorted by her individual experiences as the town's stereotypical racial perceptions are by their collective ones. Collective perspectives, therefore, are not likely to be any less biased than individual ones, as we have seen.

Moreover, slavery works in a proleptic sense. It anticipates the debate between the brutal system of slavery in the Caribbean in opposition to the paternalistic Southern model, and thus prepares the ground for the appearance of the West Indies in the story. The model of slavery adopted by Haiti makes its appearance as "the central emblem of insurrectionary terror in the slaveholding South."<sup>377</sup> This terror proves to be prophetic when we discover that Sutpen arrived in Jefferson the year slavery was abolished in the British Empire, since the premonition of the destruction of the slaveholding system with the advent of the Civil War is embodied by the ghosts of Haitian slaves in

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confrontation of Oxford and the Lafayette County with Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County, see his recent book, *Faulkner and the Southern Landscape*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 2009.

<sup>377</sup> Eric J. Sundquist, "Faulkner, Race, and Forms of American Fiction." *Faulkner and Race*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1986. Ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson and London: UP of Mississippi, 1987, 26.

the Southern town. The terror brought with Sutpen's "wild negroes" will find its next generation correspondent in the figure of Charles Bon, as we will see. As a clear counterpart to Bon's revolt against his white father's injustice, the tame and invisible Southern slaves mirror Clytie's attitude in the novel, loyal to the family, though as ambiguous as any of Faulkner's complex characters. The contra-position of the Southern slave and the slave from the West Indies already brings into the narrative the most common forms of the "Negro" stereotypes: that of the "noble savage" and that of the "wild beast."

The other speculated underlying motive for the murder, miscegenation, is also already contained within the representation of slavery, as well as other forms of racial contact such as the touch. The merging of Sutpen and his slaves, along with the haunted atmosphere created by Rosa, thus, shapes the "gothic" character implicit in the Southern myth, as understood by Eric Sundquist: "The essence of the gothic is the eruption from below of rebellious or unconscious forces and the consequent violation of boundaries, whether racial, sexual, or abstractly moral" ("Faulkner, race, 18").<sup>378</sup> Yet the shock, cruelty, and ultimate rejection by Henry, Rosa and the town, of Sutpen's fight and merging with his "wild negroes" suggests Shreve's last warning cry against the dangers of miscegenation for the "pureness of the white race" as well as for "white supremacy." Consequently, the town's view of the racial encounter is significant since it shall influence Shreve's most defined telling of the story when he adopts the same codified discourse, albeit from an ironic and uncomprehending perspective.

By way of conclusion, slavery functions as a background that activates in the reader all the subsequent conflicts in the novel by prefiguring and condensing in mirrored images the issues that are going to intersect and clash both in the story of Sutpen, and in the narrators' telling of it.

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<sup>378</sup> About the Gothic in American literature in relation to racial issues, see especially, Justin D. Edwards, *Gothic Passages: Racial Ambiguity and the American Gothic*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2003. See also the comparative study of the Gothic Other, which includes several essays on American literature and film, Ruth Bienstock Anolik and Douglass L. Howard, eds., *The Gothic Other: Racial and Social Constructions in the Literary Imagination*. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004. For a particular exploration of the uses of the gothic to represent individual and collective memory in Faulkner see Leigh Anne Duck's suggestive chapter "Faulkner and the Haunted Plantation," *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism*. Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 2006. 146-174.

### 5. 3. Neither white nor black: some historical and narrative features of the mulatto character and miscegenation

My old man died in a fine big house.  
My ma died in a shack.  
I wonder where I'm gonna die,  
Being neither white nor black?

“Cross,” Langston Hughes

No racial aspect is more central in *Absalom, Absalom!* than miscegenation. The issue of miscegenation is mainly embodied in two of the principal characters and as a likely and threatening possibility that might result from a marriage. In the common crossing of kinship and race under slavery, miscegenation condenses the heart of the racial conflict and the narrative enigma drawn in Faulkner's novel. Even though this is a very complicated issue to deal with, I will attempt to trace some historical and literary aspects that will provide us with clues to understanding the narrative function of miscegenation in the novel. Miscegenation is an axis not only of *Absalom, Absalom!* but of other novels such as *Light in August*, and *Go Down Moses*, which together portray the complexity of this issue that Faulkner certainly approached much more deeply than the already analyzed issue of slavery.<sup>379</sup>

A distinction between miscegenation and amalgamation is claimed here to ground the terminology of the analysis.<sup>380</sup> In his attribution of

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<sup>379</sup> For a specific study on miscegenation in Faulkner, set within the context of Faulkner's Mississippi and his biography (though not dealing so much with 'passing,' the bibliographical sources for which will be referred to later), see Arthur F. Kinney, *Go Down, Moses: The Miscegenation of Time*. New York and London: Twayne Publishers and Prentice Hall International, 1996.

<sup>380</sup> See, however, one very remarkable contribution to the field: James Kinney, *Amalgamation! Race, Sex, and Rhetoric in the Nineteenth-Century American Novel*. Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1985. The distinction is a matter of historical time. Before 1863, inter-racial sexual relationships produced what was called "amalgamation"; the term "miscegenation," a more precise term for what they meant, was coined in 1863. See also a selection of the writings that debated the terms and the ideas behind them in the collection of historical documents *Race, Hybridity, and Miscegenation*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi and Kristie Dotson (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005) which is dedicated specifically to the topics: "Josiah

a central role to miscegenation, Eric Sundquist feels the need for precise distinctions in his vocabulary, which I assume here. As the author says:

and the issue *Absalom, Absalom!* is so outrageously about: amalgamation—or rather, miscegenation. It is worth making this distinction, for *miscegenation* first came into being as a term in 1863, almost on the heels of the Emancipation Proclamation. *Amalgamation* meant simply a mixing, but *miscegenation* quite clearly meant interracial *sexual* mixing, and the term therefore quickly acquired a contagious and derisive force, one that expressed the nation's most visceral fears, paradoxical or not, about emancipation.<sup>381</sup>

Meanwhile miscegenation as a topic will be considered below; our discussion here will deal with the mulatto character in particular. Judith Berzon provides us with a definition, which I also adopt:

The term “mulatto” refers literally to one whose biological parents are drawn from both the Caucasian caste and the Negro caste. Both parents are full bloods, and the offspring of such a union is therefore half white and half black. However, the term is rarely used with such precision, either in the fiction or in the literature about the real mixed-blood person or his fictional counterpart. The term “mulatto” as I will use it in this study refers to all mixed bloods—quadroons, octoroons, and indistinguishable mixtures. But the key elements in distinguishing the mulatto from the full-blood black are sociological and psychological rather than biological.<sup>382</sup>

Thus, and since we are studying racial representation in the South of the United States and by a white writer, we will take the white Southern perspective of using the terms “blacks” or “African-Americans” to refer to those upon whom racial blackness has been historically imposed; that is, all those supposed to have a single drop

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Nott and the Question of Hybridity” (vol. 1), “The Miscegenation Debate” (vol. 2), and “Race amalgamation and the Future American” (vol. 3).

<sup>381</sup> Eric J. Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1983, 107.

<sup>382</sup> Judith R. Berzon, *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*. New York: New York UP, 1978, 8. For a social overview of the mulattoes up to the late twentieth century, see Stephan Talty, *Mulatto America: At the Crossroads of Black and White Culture: A Social History*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003. His chapter on the White Slave is illuminating of the problem of kinship and race and the practice of “passing” referred in this chapter.

of “black blood” were considered to be “Negros,” just as much as when in slavery the offspring of a female slave was automatically born slave (mainly in the Upper South, though in the South in general).<sup>383</sup> Obviously, this is a way of stating that I do not share any of these classifications, which today have for the most part—at least formally—fallen in disuse. My references to “race,” to “African American characters”—or to “Negro characters” as Davis chooses to refer to them in order to illuminate that she is talking about a social construct, never a biological one—are historical, and should not be understood anachronically.<sup>384</sup>

In *Absalom, Absalom!* miscegenation is incarnated in the mulatto characters of Charles Bon and Clytemnestra (Clytie), mainly, and less developed yet present at the center of the narrative, Charles Etienne St. Valery Bon, Jim Bond, the octoroon, and Charles Bon’s mother, Eulalia. There is no mixed-blood character of Indian ancestry in this novel in contrast to other novels such as *Go Down, Moses* and the story “A Justice,” where we find such an emblematic character as Sam Fathers.

#### a) Charles Bon

Charles Bon is a complex character for several reasons. Mainly, this is because he breaks the mould in many senses, since the report of his feelings and thoughts as well as the detail in which his story is developed stand in opposition to the flatness of the stereotype. However, two narrative effects complicate this interpretation. The first is that the development of Bon’s character is not based on knowledge but comes out of a concerted effort of imagination. Mr Compson and above all Shreve’s McCannon’s gradual construction of the Bon into a round character that would justify him as the first focus of attention, suspends the attachment of his character to the historical grounds for the story. That means, at least, that his relationship with historical

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<sup>383</sup> For the origins of these legal distinctions, see Kinney’s introduction to his study. See also the development of the one-drop rule in F. James Davis’ *Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1993. However, the most distinguished study on the mulattoes in the U.S. is still Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States*. New York and London: The Free Press and Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1980. On the relationship of miscegenation with Faulkner’s fictions see his *William Faulkner and Southern History*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993, 382-6.

<sup>384</sup> See Davis’ preface to the aforementioned book *Faulkner’s “Negro.”*

times is complex, for he is made to appear as a product of the narrator's imagination to the suspicious reader. Along with the problem of his doubtful status in relation to the 'truth' of the story, some racial stereotypes in his character are combined in a way that both deny his mono-faceted personality at the same time that they evince his struggle to break racial codes. Furthermore, it seems that its meeting of a diverse range of racial stereotypes acts very similarly to those activated by Melville's Captain Delano in *Benito Cereno*, yet in a more ambivalent way. Indeed, Bon's unveiling activates the contemporary suspicions of a character that aims to perform a "passing," as we are going to see, and so his racial identity is confusing and enigmatic. What is clear, anyway, is that my analysis faces a challenge here with such a controversial character.

To avoid any imprecision, let us turn to the characters themselves. Charles Bon seems to be Thomas Sutpen's first son by a half-French woman supposedly with "black blood" in her veins. He meets Henry Sutpen at the University and goes to Jefferson on three occasions. As it is made clear, neither of the narrators or any of the people closest to them had known him. His first appearances come from the town and are described by Mr Compson:

Charles Bon of New Orleans, Henry's friend who was not only some few years older than Henry but actually a little old to be still in college and certainly a little out of place in that one where he was—a small new college in the Mississippi hinterland and even wilderness, three hundred miles from that worldly and even foreign city which was his home—a young man of a worldly elegance and assurance beyond his years, handsome, apparently wealthy and with for background the shadowy figure of a legal guardian rather than any parents—a personage who in the remote Mississippi of that time must have appeared almost phoenix-like, full-sprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time and, vanished, leaving no bones nor dust anywhere—a man with an ease of manner and a swaggering gallant air in comparison with which Sutpen's pompous arrogance was clumsy bluff and Henry actually a hobble-de-hoy. Miss Rosa never saw him; this was a picture, an image. (61)

Charles Bon's good looks, elegance and distinct way of life comes from the still present French environment he has been surrounded with in New Orleans, and from the French West Indies and his

French planter family.<sup>385</sup> There is nothing unique in this description but rather a conflict that historically arose between the mulatto or “colored” and free African Americans in New Orleans and the Lower South, over the different rights they had in the past when Louisiana was a French and Spanish colony. As Berzon notes,

In certain places—New Orleans, Charleston, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, among others—black middle- and upper-class communities have emphasized their rejection of the black proletariat and have embraced white middle-class values in which physical appearance, (white) ancestry, money, status, and conspicuous consumption play major roles. (6)

In New Orleans in particular, this community is historical, since “prior to the Civil War, New Orleans had the largest community of free Negroes anywhere in the South, and the wealth of this community was considerable” (105). This issue very much sets up a contrast between free, bourgeois African Americans and those still subdued (both antebellum and postbellum), to an extent that Berzon dedicates a whole chapter to “The Mulatto as Black Bourgeois.”<sup>386</sup> Thus, the specific stereotype here is in fact the French Créole. This is remarkable because, although at first it seems that Charles Bon is a white créole, merely the fact that he is a créole suggests the possibility of a mixed-blood in the South, which arises from the differences between Mississippi and the former French Louisiana. Furthermore, Bon’s suspicious créolité will be reinforced by his Spanish ancestry supposedly revealed in the war episode, since, as Manuel Broncano explains “the Spanish ingredient in the novel emerges as synonymous with miscegenation, the ‘thing not named,’ the unspeakable truth that Sutpen tries in vain to erase from his fate.”<sup>387</sup> This observation does

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<sup>385</sup> See Charles Bon’s dandyism and its connection to Oscar Wilde in Ellen Crowell, “The Picture of Charles Bon: Oscar Wilde’s Trip Through Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 50.3 (Fall 2004): 595-631.

<sup>386</sup> For a general view on the city of New Orleans from both a historical and aesthetic point of view in Faulkner’s work, see Taylor Hagood, *Faulkner’s Imperialism: Space, Place, and the Materiality of Myth*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008.

<sup>387</sup> Manuel Broncano, “Reading Faulkner in Spain, Reading Spain in Faulkner.” *Global Faulkner: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 2006. Ed. Annette Trefzer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2009, 109. The author makes the argument more complex by noting that “Sutpen’s design is based both on exploitation and repudiation of the Spanish other: a dispossessed and exiled Southerner, Sutpen marries into the Haitian plantation, gaining thus access to class and wealth, but he repudiates wife and son on racial grounds. In exchange, he receives the slaves and

not only seek to locate Bon within the traditional representation of mulattoes, in contrast to the interpretations that see in his lauded almost white virtues the source of Faulkner's benevolence; but also aims at emphasizing the coherence of his origin in the development of the conflict with his would-be father, Thomas Sutpen.

The aforementioned discrepancies in the rights for mixed blood individuals in Louisiana before the Purchase in 1803 lead to a conflictive situation for the creoles in the New World Nation. Barbara Ladd explains that

In the Deep South, however, traditions were different. Until the Louisiana Purchase, racial classifications were in some ways based upon the status of the father. Children of white fathers were more easily manumitted in the Deep South, and fathers acknowledged those children more frequently than in the Upper South. Children could inherit from the white father's estate more frequently than in the Upper South. . . . Throughout the Caribbean (and in New Orleans), these children of European colonists and African women constituted a separate caste. They were recognized by law as well as by sentiment as bearing some legitimacy as carriers of European 'blood' or 'culture', although one would not want to overstate this point. (21)<sup>388</sup>

The purchase of Louisiana was part of a nationalist project of the expansion of the United States, which, as Ladd says, "had never been particularly hospitable to assimilation." As a matter of fact,

Initially, Creoles of color seem to have had some hopes that the new U.S. government in Louisiana would augment their status, but the segregationist ideology of the United States not only prevented any such thing from happening but also tended to eradicate the distinctions of caste already in existence. (23)

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the money that provide for his new beginning on the Mississippi frontier, and it is with Spanish gold that he sanctions his claim to the land." (ibid.) It is worth observing here that the relationship between Spanish and miscegenation was already present at least in 1724, when "Intendant Mithon raised the prospect that the French in Saint-Domingue would soon resemble a race of mixed bloods like their Spanish neighbors" (Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2005, 211).

<sup>388</sup> Barbara Ladd, *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1996, 21.

As a consequence of this, Creoles of color were considered “free man/women of color” and by 1820 began to be persecuted, as the issue of white purity was growing into an obsession.<sup>389</sup> Creoles of color (and whites as well) were progressively associated with “the colonist site of slavery, miscegenation, and political and cultural degeneration” (25). These connections reinforced and maintained the idea that Creoles were a threat because they represented the connection between the slave revolutions in the West Indies and the South. Even though I am introducing here the issue of Haiti in *Absalom, Absalom!*, which should be considered later, this historical reference is unavoidable when dealing with Charles Bon as a character. Several factors, among which the Haitian Revolution is crucial, explain the increasing condition of mulattoes as slaves. As James Kinney explains, “[w]hile the old slave states, especially in the upper South, contained many free mulattoes, in the new slave states almost all mulattoes were slaves. This circumstance developed because the importing of African slaves ended in 1807 and the domestic slave trade burgeoned after the 1820’s. . . . In the South, especially after the Slave Act of 1807 increased the need to breed domestic slaves, and after 1830 when extensive use of the cotton gin, Nat Turner’s Rebellion, and other factors increased proslavery pressures, the laws became more restrictive” (9).

Consequently, Charles Bon is one of the Creoles of color that had a privileged status in the Caribbean and which carried over into antebellum New Orleans. In his life and his personality he carries both the ideal of the bourgeois mulatto, and the threat he poses when he crosses the boundary of the old Louisiana port towards the Deep South. Yet the narrators’ point of view still complicates the issue. Since they are living the Mississippi of 1910, their perspective, as

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<sup>389</sup> The Louisiana Civil Code of 1808 already prohibited intermarriage between “free white persons with free persons of color” and this persisted until 1857 when there were demands to make the intermarriage prohibitions harsher because the code assumed that a person was ‘colored’—different from slave in Louisiana’s tripartite legal distinctions—based on visibility. Thus, it was obvious that many mulattoes “who looked white but who could be shown to have ‘a touch of the tarbrush’ were marrying white persons.” In this we see how the social and economic differences, along with the Spanish and French legacies, still helped to maintain some differences. For all the particularities of the racial distinctions in Louisiana, see the well documented study, from which this information has been taken, Virginia R. Domínguez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1986, 25-6.

Reichard observed, is like a refractor: it reads the representation of race through present time eyes.<sup>390</sup> In this sense, it is not strange that Bon's intentions when showing the octoroon to Henry are remarkably provocative, as told by Mr Compson. Even though it is true that Mr Compson's tale is not racial since he does not know that Bon might be black, he disapproves of Bon's relationship with her mistress and therefore projects upon the scene a negative light dealing both with interracial relations and eventual bigamy. Mr Compson's depicting of Bon starts a process of evolution of the character in which the activation of stereotypes will reconstruct Bon from apparently white to black. As Ladd states "William Faulkner's Charles Bon is a white Creole for a long time before he is revealed (or 'reconstructed') as black" (*Nationalism* 20).<sup>391</sup> When the process starts, the audience's schemata revitalize the connections with the character and get prepared for the last revelation that Bon is black.

Mr Compson's voice of persuasion in Chapter IV prepares the ground for Shreve's unreliable one when describing Bon. Mr Compson's movement of perspective from the common knowledge of the town towards the inner motivations that lead to the killing deeply affects the representation of Bon. If in the previous chapters Mr Compson has insisted on the town's ignorance of Bon, who is for many, including Rosa, an "invisible" character;<sup>392</sup> here Mr Compson dares to delve deep into the Creole's intentions yet told in an indirect mode. The main focus is Henry's thoughts, though in his relationship with Bon,

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<sup>390</sup> Here we can recall how the interchangeability of the ideas of "blacks" and "slaves," which is present at the beginning of slavery yet which will be enforced by the potent racial discourse of the decades leading up to the Civil War, is in fact an anachronism, and is, indeed, part of the process of mythification of the New South and of the narrators'. This confusion is made clear by Alejo Carpentier's character Ti Noël in *El reino de este mundo*, when he realizes that the black king Henri Christophe is enslaving his fellow black Haitians, and he realizes that the conflict was not essentially that of blacks against whites but rather slaves against masters.

<sup>391</sup> Ladd makes a generational distinction between Jason Compson's and Quentin's perspective on Bon that allows her to argue that "although both imagine Bon as a creole possessed of the expected creole decadence and capable of corrupting the innocence of Sutpen, it is only in Quentin's narrative that Bon is constructed as black." ("The Direction of the Howling?: Nationalism and the Color line in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!: A Casebook*. Ed. Fred Hobson. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003, 237.)

<sup>392</sup> Martin Kreiswirth sees this invisibility as uncanny in "Faulkner's Dark House: The Uncanny Inheritance of Race." *Faulkner's Inheritance*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2005. Eds. Joseph R. Urgo and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2007. 126-140.

the latter character demands some elaboration. Mr Compson, therefore, starts the process of constructing Bon as a character. He emphasizes the difference in the conceptions of interracial love relationships in New Orleans and Mississippi. As Mr Compson speculates:

He [Bon] must have known that Sutpen now knew his secret—if Bon, until he saw Sutpen’s reaction to it, ever looked upon it as a cause for secrecy, certainly not as a valid objection to marriage with a white woman—a situation in which probably all his contemporaries who could afford it were likewise involved and which it would no more have occurred to him to mention to his bride or wife or to her family than he would have told them the secrets of a fraternal organization which he had joined before he married. In fact, the manner in which his intended bride’s family reacted to the discovery of it was doubtless the first and last time when the Sutpen family ever surprised him. (77)

As the narrator explicitly mentions later, Bon’s morganatic ceremony is “a situation which was as much a part of a wealthy young New Orleansian’s social and fashionable equipment as his dancing sleepers” (83).<sup>393</sup> Besides his peculiar origin, which allows his perception to be, like that of Sutpen, “apparently complete, without background or past or childhood” (77), Bon’s seducing of the white Sutpen brother and sister “without any effort or particular desire to do so” (77) had turned him into “a mere spectator, passive, a little sardonic, and completely enigmatic” (77). The little knowledge Mr Compson’s has of Charles Bon affects his point of view on the character that he judges:

He seems to hover, shadowy, almost substanceless, a little behind and above all the other straightforward and logical even though (to him) incomprehensible ultimatums and affirmations and defiances and challenges and repudiations, with an air of sardonic and indolent detachment like that of a youthful Roman consul making the Grand Tour of his day among the barbarian hordes which his grandfather conquered, benighted in a brawling and childish and quite deadly mud-castle household in a miasmatic and spirit-ridden forest. (77)

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<sup>393</sup> There are many other references in the text that emphasize the distinction between New Orleans and the American South, for example the encounters in New Orleans with other people who think differently and have different conventions in pages 90, 93, 95, which will be discussed afterwards.

Bon's "impenetrable imperturbability" due to that "barrier of sophistication in comparison with which Henry and Sutpen were troglodytes" (77) detaches him from the moral context of the story set by Mr Compson: that of the debate around marriage and interracial relationships. Bon does not appear worried by his new context.<sup>394</sup> Sophistication is the source of indifference and it is in direct relationship with his "Latin" or "French" cultural origins, which are also emphasized, for instance, in the quoted passage. Furthermore, his distinct origins upon entering the deep Southern society shape his place in the story in Mr Compson's eyes as "the marginal men" mulattos are often named for.

It is interesting to note here how in the novel as a whole, but especially when talking about Bon and the Sutpen's children, Mr. Compson's discourse foreshadows the racial issue as the seed of the conflict by the use of his vocabulary. When dealing with Bon's "prowess among women" and his indifferent courtship of Judith, Mr Compson refers to Henry and Judith's close relationship saying that "that report not like the conventional delusion of that between twins but rather such as might exist between two people who, regardless of sex or age or heritage of race or tongue, had been marooned at birth on a desert island: the island here Sutpen's Hundred; the solitude, the shadow of that father with whom not only the town but their mother's family as well had merely assumed armistice rather than accepting and assimilating" (82). This passage mirrors the racial tragedy in many senses: Mr Compson uses words related to race in their reference to darkness such as "race," "maroon" (echoed in its paronomasia with "marooned"), "shadow," or "assimilating," the meaning of which is not related to race in the passage, though its polysemy uncovers the racial connotation on a second reading. Furthermore, Bon's situation as a supposed black son of Thomas Sutpen does not become an issue until the moment he goes to Sutpen's Hundred, a place, a family, and a town that are literally against "accepting and assimilating," but rather predisposed to direct confrontation and ultimate segregation. Mr Compson does not know Bon is black but his vocabulary creates an

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<sup>394</sup> There are many other quotations which insist on this idea, such as the following one: "this man who later showed the same indolence, almost uninterest, the same detachment when the uproar about that engagement which, so far as Jefferson knew, never formally existed, which Bon himself never affirmed or denied, arose and he in the background, impartial and passive as though it were not himself involved or he acting on behalf of some absent friend, but as though the person involved and interdict were someone whom he had never heard of and cared nothing about." (81)

atmosphere for the reader that, once again, prepares him to face the suggested argument of race at the centre of the conflict.<sup>395</sup>

As it has been mentioned in the analysis of narrative voice, right next to his greatest deepening into the character of Bon, Mr Compson refers to the fragility of his telling, where “something is missing” (83). This feeling is translated later, when Mr Compson says that “Bon with that sardonic and surprised distaste with seems to have been the ordinary manifestation of the impenetrable and shadowy character. Yes shadowy: a myth, a phantom: something which they engendered and created whole themselves; some effluvium of Sutpen blood and character, as though as a man he did not exist at all” (86).

Finally, Bon’s mean calculation of the events much further developed by Shreve is pointed out here by Mr Compson while he imagines the scene when Bon brings Henry to meet his octoroon mistress and child: “I can imagine how he did it—the calculation, the surgeon’s alertness and cold detachment, the exposures brief, so brief as to be cryptic, almost staccato, the plate unaware of what the complete picture would show, scarce-seen yet ineradicable” (92).

Mr Compson’s last extended reference to Bon is his only preserved letter to Judith, written the same year the Civil War finished, after four years during which Henry and Bon had been enlisted in the Confederate army. Bon’s words and intentions in the letter are extraordinarily ambiguous, so ambiguous that the only thing we can distinctly appreciate is his concern with words and his own struggle to materialize the complexity of life in language, which makes him the author of an impressive enigma. Bon’s letter works as a narrative mirror of the other narrators’ discourse, and justifies the interest this central character gathers in his unbearable hollowness, very similar to that of Jim in Conrad’s *Lord Jim*.

Shreve decides to rouse the character out of this enigmatic narration that still does not explain. Shreve will place Bon at the centre of his narrative, thus pushing the telling to develop him as a main character. Whereas this construction involves Bon’s thoughts and intentions

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<sup>395</sup> One example that seems to demonstrate that Mr Compson does not know Bon is black is his affirmation, in relation to his son: “the existence of the eight part negro mistress and the sixteenth part negro son, granted even the morganatic ceremony” (83).

which especially reveal Shreve as an unreliable narrator; they also picture him as a tragic sentimental character, “inseparable from his exoticism” as Philip Weinstein puts it, very much in contrast to Mr Compson’s Bon.<sup>396</sup> However distant in elaboration and personality these two Bons are, Shreve initially takes up the strand of Mr Compson’s Charles Bon as sarcastic, indifferent and detached in his relationship with Henry and Judith, but moves his deepest emotional hurt towards Thomas Sutpen’s acknowledgment of him as his son. By this shift in his interests (Bon as a character, and the issue of acknowledgment as the emotional focus), the flattest Bon emerges from a marginal threat towards an ambivalent figure that blends menace with tragedy.<sup>397</sup>

A couple of examples shall suffice to illuminate Shreve’s construction of the tragic character. Bon’s tragic fate is arranged from the beginning of the narrative in Shreve’s invention of Bon’s childhood and, principally, of his mother’s mental distress in telling her hatred for having been abandoned. Shreve tells how

Jesus, you can almost see him: a little boy already come to learn, to expect, before he could remember having learned his own name or the name of the town where he lived or how to say either of them, that every so often he would be snatched up from playing and held gripped between the two hands fierce with (what passed at least with him for it) love, against the two fierce rigid knees, the face that he remembered since before remembering began as supervising all the animal joys of palate and stomach and entrails, of warmth and pleasure and security, swooping down at him in a kind of blazing immobility. . . . the face filled with furious and almost unbearable unforgiving almost like fever (not bitterness and despair: just implacable will for revenge) as just another manifestation of mammalian love (245)

While his doomed life is already perceived before he was even born, Bon’s tragedy reaches its height from the moment Henry and Bon go

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<sup>396</sup> Philip M. Weinstein, *Faulkner’s Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992, 55; for the idea of eroticizing the Other, see Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, *Subversive Voices: Eroticizing the Other in William Faulkner and Toni Morrison*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2001.

<sup>397</sup> Irving Howe relates Faulkner’s ambivalent feelings towards miscegenation to his representation of the mulatto characters in his work in “Faulkner and the Negroes.” *Faulkner: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Richard H. Brodhead. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983, 57.

to Sutpen's Hundred, and afterwards when they participate in the Civil War and come across Sutpen's regiment. After the first visits to Sutpen's Hundred, Shreve's idea that Bon's concern was being acknowledged has already become an obsession, as a result of which Shreve's discourse achieves the highest pathos at precisely this point.<sup>398</sup> He makes Bon say and think

*It will be Henry who will get the letter, the letter saying it is inconvenient for me to come that time; so apparently he does not intend to acknowledge me as his son, but at last I shall have forced him to admit that I am. . . . Yes. Yes. I will renounce her; I will renounce love and all; that will be cheap, cheap, even though he say to me 'never look upon my face again; take my love and my acknowledgment in secret, and go' I will do that; I will not even demand to know of him what it was my mother did that justified his action toward her and me. (268)*

And when the boys come across Sutpen's regiment, Bon's mulatto crisis keeps intensifying,

*But to Bon it was not the space between them and defeat but the space between him and the other regiment, between him and the hour, the moment: 'He will not even have to ask me; I will just touch flesh with him and I will say it myself. You will not need to worry; she shall never see me again. . . . Maybe that first time Sutpen actually did not see him, maybe that first time he could tell himself, 'That was why; he didn't see me', so that he had to put himself in Sutpen's way, make his chance and situation. Then for the second time he looked at the expressionless and rocklike face, at the pale boring eyes in which there was not flicker, nothing, the face in which he saw his own features, in which he saw recognition, and that was all. (287)*

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<sup>398</sup> Shreve's construction of Charles Bon's obsession with being acknowledged as Thomas Sutpen's son is, in fact, part of the mainstream representation of the mulatto in the South. It is worth recalling here Erskine Peters' words about this: "The theme surrounding most tragic mulattos in American literature has been that of the identity crisis. However, it is the denial of birthright as an extension of the denial of black humanity which is the true core of the problem. The often noticeable sympathy for the suffering mulatto character, more than the suffering of the ordinary black character, because it is mere tokenism, is further substantiation of the existence of the myth in the white mind of black inferiority." (*William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha World and Black Being*. Darby: Norwood Editions, 1983, 114.) On the idea of patriarchy in the novel and, by extension, patriarchal dominion over sons, blacks, and mainly women, see John N. Duvall's chapter "Patriarchal Designation: The Repression of the Feminine in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Faulkner's Marginal Couple: Invisible, Outlaw, and Unspeakable Communities*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1990. 101-118. On the idea of the semiotic other, following Kristeva's approach though applied to race, see J. G. Brister, "*Absalom, Absalom!* and the Semiotic Other." *The Faulkner Journal* 22.1/2 (Fall 2006): 39-53.

This passage shapes Bon's tragedy of not being acknowledged, and represents what in mulatto studies has been labelled the "crisis experience," to which both Berzon and Faulkner's contemporary Evett V. Stonequist dedicate chapters in their books. The latter critic is particularly interesting since he reveals a widely acknowledged awareness of the mulattos and "marginal men" in general at the very moment Faulkner is writing about them. He explains the crisis experience and its outcomes:

Experiencing the conflict of cultures constitutes the turning point in the career of the individual. This is the period when the characteristic personality traits first appear. The experience itself is a shock. The individual finds his social world disorganized. Personal relations and cultural forms which he had previously taken for granted suddenly become problematic. He does not know quite how to act. There is a feeling of confusion, of loss of direction, of being overwhelmed.<sup>399</sup>

The crisis experience places the marginal man, the mulatto in this case, in an alienated position between the two cultures that she or he comes from, since "having participated in each he is now able to look at himself from the two viewpoints: the marginal Jew sees himself from the Jewish standpoint and from the Gentile standpoint; the marginal Negro from that of the white man as well as the black man" (Stonequist 145). It is this peculiar position of an insider as well as an outsider that provides the figure of the mixed-blood with its two functions in society: the intermediary and the looming threat.<sup>400</sup> While characters such as Clytie primarily function as intermediary characters in *Absalom, Absalom!*, that of Charles Bon activates the function of the threat. This function comes from the fact observed by Stonequist that "[b]ecause of his in-between situation, the marginal man may become

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<sup>399</sup> Evett V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man: A Study in personality and culture conflict*. 1937. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965, 140. This book is of particular documentary interest because it is a historical document for us. First published in 1937, a year after the publication of *Absalom, Absalom!*, it works as proof of the ideas that circulated in Faulkner's times. The author extensively cites Du Bois' ideas on the double-consciousness to account for the marginal man's crisis experience. See the even earlier evaluation of the mulatto in relation to the mixed blood people in other contexts, in Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States: Including a Study of the Rôle of Mixed-Blood Races Throughout the World*. 1918. New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1969.

<sup>400</sup> In this sense, the figure of the mulatto could be seen as a liminal figure, as Professor Nora Catelli, noted to me, and thus its location in the limits of society and its threatening function.

an acute and able critic of the dominant group and its culture. . . . His analysis is not necessarily objective—there is too much emotional tension underneath to make such an attitude easy of achievement. But he is skilful in noting the contradictions and the ‘hypocrisies’ in the dominant culture” (155).

Nonetheless, the threat represented by the mulattos is due to the difficulty of classifying them in a biracial society, which would challenge the color line and ultimately destroy the basis for white privileges. The practices that fundamentally imperil this unequal social, economic, and political system are continuous miscegenation and the “passing” for white of many very light-skinned mulattos like Charles Bon, Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, or Joe Christmas. Just for the purpose of clarification, Joe Williamson explains that “invisible blackness also produced another phenomenon called ‘passing.’ Passing meant crossing the race line and winning acceptance as white in the white world. Now and again, light mulattoes would simply drop out of sight, move to an area where they were not known, usually north or west, and allow their new neighbors to take them as white” (*New People* 100). “Passing” was not only regarded by whites as a provocation but it mainly performed the scorning of the established segregated order and, worse than that, secretly opened the gate to clandestine interracial relations and miscegenation with ‘pure whites’ or, as Shreve concludes, “bleaching out” and secretly contaminating white purity. On the other hand, as Grace Elizabeth Hale points out, “[p]assing and mimicking and masking—the creation with more or less self-consciousness of a ‘miscegenated’ style—became by the late 1920s the ultimate resistance to the racial polarities whites set at the center of the modern American life. For segregation, as metaphor and as law, depended upon a myth of absolute racial difference, a translation of the body into collective meaning, into culture. Any public staging by African Americans of a space between black and white subverted the fantasies of absolute division that founded an expansive whiteness. Black activists and artists would continually reconfigure the mix of their miscegenated appropriations.”<sup>401</sup> If, coming from the quills of African American writers “passing” entails a form of resistance, in the case of white writers it usually, yet ambiguously, serves as an embodiment of threat.

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<sup>401</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* 40.

On the other hand, mulattos defined as “Negro” likewise bear the attribution of the danger of ultimate racial violence, which fed the stereotype of the “Negro as beast.” Although this stereotype of the “wild nigger” had been already shaped in the antebellum period, as Melville’s *Benito Cereno* accounts for, the postbellum South intensified its presence, as Sundquist remarks:

Like Faulkner in the characterization of Joe Christmas, however, Twain fused the antebellum and modern worlds by dramatizing the essential reversal in meaning miscegenation underwent after emancipation, whereby the fact of slaveholding miscegenation by white masters and the feared potential for slave rebellion were together transformed into the new specter of black crime and contamination—the Negro as ‘beast’ (“Faulkner, Race 9”) <sup>402</sup>

The emphasis on the “Negro as beast” stereotype continues the underlying contradiction of slavery in the South, and it has a great influence on the definition of the mulatto as a threat. The reasons for emphasizing the cruel aspect of the mulatto arise from the fact that “the mulatto is the only-too-obvious badge of white abuse of the Negro, of the hidden anguish of the system of slavery, of the continuing hypocrisy in racial attitudes. He is a familiar mystery to the Southerner, the bar sinister of his family, his servant and his brother, a man of his own race whose whole life is alien and enigmatic to the white man” (Berzon 53).

Indeed, from the mystery that surrounds the figure of the mulatto, Faulkner elaborates in Charles Bon a complex character which dramatizes both the emotional struggle of the mulattoes—though from an external point of view—and the menace inherent in their claiming for a recognition of the sin of miscegenation which has ruined Sutpen’s dynasty and dream.

The function of menace is enriched by Faulkner’s narrative construction of the character. It is first introduced not through miscegenation but through incest. Incest works as a parallel motif that first appears as the real menace, and that allows the transference from the threat of endogamy to the threat of miscegenation, thus drawing

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<sup>402</sup> See the comparative studies on Faulkner and Twain which include several essays on the issue of miscegenation, Robert W. Hamblin and Melanie Speight, eds., *Faulkner and Twain*. Cape Girardeau: Southeast Missouri State UP, 2009.

the reader into a single sinful perspective of Bon: he is initially a threat because of incest, and afterwards because of the effects of miscegenation on the eventual offspring. This convergence of the two main taboos in Yoknapatawpha, though it is by no means an exceptional combination in Southern literature, as Werner Sollors explains, renders Bon's presentation in the narrative much richer.<sup>403</sup>

Regardless of how the narrators understand the character, Bon's threatening function is clear in Sutpen's forbidding of Judith and Bon's marriage, which in any case precipitates the family's downfall. The threat of incest will function, in fact, as the foreshadowing motif of the actual murder of Bon, and Henry's consequent flight from home, suggesting "that the power of the fear of miscegenation could exceed by far that of the incest taboo," and thus revising Thomas Dixon's *Sins of the Father* (1912), as Sollors explains (329-30).<sup>404</sup> Whereas for the reader the dreaded focus of the threat for the moment is incest, the process of the construction of Bon as a mulatto character has already been developed as a subtle characterization in accordance with racial stereotypes. It is precisely this process of

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<sup>403</sup> Werner Sollors dedicates a documented chapter to this theme in *Neither black nor white yet both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997. It is worth recalling here Henry Hughes' words in his racist *Treatise on Sociology* (1854. New York: Negro UPs, 1968, 240) in which he already says: "Hybridism is heinous. Impurity of races is against the law of nature. Mulattoes are monsters. The law of nature is the law of God. The same law which forbids consanguineous amalgamation; forbids ethical amalgamation. Both are incestuous. Amalgamation is incest." Christopher Peterson develops his perspective that the house divided is as like a body divided. He sees in Henry, Bon and Judith's triangle "a tripartite transgression of the prohibitions on miscegenation, incest, and same-sex desire that in turn deconstructs the integrity of their bodies." ("The Haunted House of Kinship: Miscegenation, Homosexuality, and Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The New Centennial Review* 4.1, Spring 2004, 244.) Similarly, Betina Entzminger discusses two of these issues in "Passing as Miscegenation: Whiteness and Homoeroticism in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Faulkner Journal* 22.1/2 (Fall 2006): 90-105. Another author who treats miscegenation and the 'life of the strangers in the self,' and thus in the body, and links it to the episodes of Haiti in the novel is Vera M. Kutzinski in her article "Borders and Bodies: The United States, America, and the Caribbean." *The New Centennial Review* 1.2 (Fall 2001): 55-88; See also on this the comparison to Toni Morrison's *Paradise* in Jill C. Jones, "The Eye of a Needle: Morrison's *Paradise*, Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, and the American Jeremiad." *The Faulkner Journal* XVII.2 (Spring 2002): 3-23.

<sup>404</sup> It is worth referring here Werner Sollors' edition of an anthology of texts on interracialism that offers a range of perspectives on the topic: *Interracialism: Black-White Inter-marriage in American History, Literature, and Law*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000.

activating the racial codes present in the social environment of the South in 1936 which ‘naturally’ leads to the discovery that Bon is, in fact, black. Consequently, the reader first learns of the menace, and is afterwards only asked to substitute the sin that generates it for another which has been historically connected to the former.

Thadious Davis defines Charles Bon’s characterization in the novel when she states that Quentin and Shreve’s “fabrications create an illusion of reality; their construct is quite believable. All rational investigations lead to a basic reality: Charles Bon as ‘nigger’” (*Faulkner’s “Negro”* 218). In fact, Charles Bon fits many of the stereotypes of the ‘Negro’ that racial discourse in the South filtered.<sup>405</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapter, Shreve is responsible for most of this portrait, when he explains that Bon discovers “breathing, pleasure, darkness; and without money there could be no pleasure, and without pleasure it would not even be breathing” (247). Pleasure and obscurity are, as we have seen in *Lord Jim*, associated with the “Dark Continent,” with barbarism and “uncivilized races.” Here the stereotype meets Bhabha’s fetishistic dynamics. Added to this there is Bon’s wasting of his mother’s money, as Shreve’s lawyer is reported to be thinking: “and subtract the money that Bon was spending on his whores and his champagne from what his mother had, and figure up how much would be left of it tomorrow” (248), “thinking about the good hard cash that Bon was throwing away on his horses and clothes and the champagne and gambling and women” (249). This way of life fits the image of mulatto or black bourgeois’ life in cities like New Orleans, as depicted in literature. Berzon notes that “in the twentieth-century novels, more than in those of a century before, we see an emphasis on status symbols: clothes, expensive homes and cares, academic degrees, servants. There is an obvious emphasis on conspicuous consumption. The ‘good life’ is depicted in all of Jessie Fauset’s novels *There Is Confusion*, *Plum Bun*, *The Chinaberry Tree*, and *Comedy*, *American Style*, all contain long, loving descriptions of clothes, and to a lesser extent, of other possessions—furniture, paintings, and so on” (170). There is a clear emphasis on them too in *Absalom, Absalom!*, especially on clothes and a relaxed French style of life, as seen before and repeated in the following quote: “in the fine figure he—’ neither of them said Bon ‘—cut the fine pants that fit his leg

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<sup>405</sup> There is a parallel construction of blackness/whiteness in *Light in August*, which has been analyzed by Patricia McKee in *Producing American Races: Henry James, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1999.

and the fine coats that fit his shoulders nor in the fact that he had more watches and cuff buttons and finer linen and horses and yellow-wheeled buggies (not to mention the gals) than most others did” (251). Yet drinking, gambling and whoring also meet the stereotypes of the black man’s vicious nature, and are defined against the virtues of the Anglo-Saxons whom mulattoes were trying to resemble. While among the mulatto bourgeoisie there is an aim to embrace white virtues which should spare them from the common accusations against blacks, in *Absalom, Absalom!* the exaggeration of Bon’s fluid status in fact reveals his “Negro blood.” Indeed, whereas chastity was “the best proof of respectability in the eyes of the white man, who had constantly argued that the Negro’s ‘savage instincts’ prevented him from conforming to Puritanical standards of sex behavior” (Berzon 168), Charles Bon relapses into these ‘savage instincts’ again when spending his good money on prostitutes. In following Mr Compson’s concern about his octoroon mistress, Shreve insistently elaborates Bon’s promiscuity and experience with women.

Shreve’s emphasis not only endorses the stereotype of the heightened sexuality of blacks as codified in racial discourses throughout the nineteenth-century, but it also contributes to Bon’s menacing function. Indeed, in the white racist mind there is a direct relationship between sexual behavior and racial purity, as he himself is made to say when revealing to Henry that “*I am the nigger that is going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry*” (294). Certain types of sexual behavior constituted a menace to the U.S. national identity, as Davenport observes in analyzing Dixon’s statements:<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> It is worth noting here one very likely origin (amongst others) of the stereotype of the black man as rapist. Kinney observes that: “The violent hostility toward miscegenation did not begin until after 1830 when slavery became an economic necessity, and those benefitting from it began to justify slavery on racial grounds.

Because of the heavy legal penalties imposed on white women, however, the ploy of crying rape when caught with a black man began early. The white woman who bore a mulatto child had much more to fear than the white man who fathered one. To avoid being indentured, some white women accused their black lovers of rape. . . . Virginia court records reveal at least sixty rape convictions of black men between 1789 and 1833. The rape of black women by men of either race did not exist under the law; therefore in all rape cases the victim had to be a white woman. The large number of cases certainly puts the lie to postwar claims common in the South that the black rape of white women never existed under slavery. Even more contrary to our conventional ideas, in twenty-seven of the sixty convictions, whites testified on behalf of the accused black, declaring that it was not a case of rape because the white woman consented to the act.” (*Amalgamation* 15).

this passage suggests the white man's fear of the Negro's sexuality. The image of the towering Negro is phallic, throwing its blight over future generations. The bestial miscegenation which surely must come with Negro liberation and equality will corrupt the white race. This projected sexual threat to racial purity was Dixon's primary link with the national imagination. The Negro is viewed not only as a threat to the South but also to the nation. . . . Yet the Abolitionists were seen as having blindly tried to destroy this "racial integrity," not realizing, according to Dixon that

one drop of Negro blood makes a negro. It kinks the hair, flatters the nose, thickens the lip, puts out the light of intellect, and lights the fires of brutal passions. The beginning of Negro equality as a vital fact is the beginning of the end of this nation's life. There is enough negro blood here to make mulatto the whole Republic . . . . Can you build in a Democracy, a nation inside a nation of two hostile races? (LS, p. 242)." (28)

It is clear then that Bon fits many of the stereotypes that are a source of threat in the story: he is a mulatto, sexually powerful, and he was born in Haiti.

In this process of constructing a "Negro character" Bon is progressively revealed as the marginal man. The mulatto position of an outsider is further disclosed in what becomes Shreve's *leitmotif* of the smile, which develops and incarnates Mr Compson's characterization of Bon's indifference. Shreve mentions it, for example, to show Bon's contempt towards his mistress when telling her mother:

he looking at her from behind the smiling that wasn't smiling but was just something you were not supposed to see beyond, saying admitting it: 'Why not? All young men do it. The ceremony too. I didn't set out to get the child, but now that I have. . . . It's not a bad child either'. . . . 'Why not? Men seem to have to marry some day, sooner or later. And this is one whom I know, who makes me no trouble. And with the ceremony, that bother, already done. And as for a little matter like a spot of negro blood—' (254)

Bon's enigmatic meanness or indifference is present also in the way he says farewell to the octoroon: "'All right' he said, not goodbye"; he didn't care; maybe not even goodbye to the octoroon, to those tears and lamentations and maybe even the clinging, the soft despairing magnolia-colored arms about his knees, and (say) there and a half feet above those boneless steel gives that expression of his which was not

smiling but just something not to be seen through” (257).<sup>407</sup> His cynical perspective is the distance represented by the mulattoes whose marginality allows them a critical perspective on what is going on around them, and whose ambivalent attitude disturbs and disorients both whites and blacks.<sup>408</sup>

Shreve even distances Bon from his love for Judith, and therefore continues that strand of Mr Compson’s telling, and builds up a relationship between Judith and Bon that does not please Quentin because he thinks that “it’s not love” (266). Thereby, Shreve often sees Bon as encouraging and even manipulating the siblings’ love for him as a way to achieving Sutpen’s acknowledgment.

Along with the personality and attitude attributed to Bon, his Haitian origins provide the reader with the most compelling clue to understanding the vicious “Negro” inside him. The issue of Haiti in the novel shall be further discussed.

Two other signs draw the reader’s attention to a possible secret in Bon’s blood. First, Shreve’s subtle insinuations about “something foreign or alien in the blood of Bon’s mother and himself” and, secondly, the textual use of words associated with darkness, mystery, and curse.<sup>409</sup> Shreve makes Bon think and say in his conversation with his mother about the octoroon that “not needing to say *I seem to have been born into this world with so few fathers that I have too many brothers to outrage and shame while alive and hence too many descendants to bequeath my little portion of hurt and harm to, dead; not that, just ‘a little spot of negro blood’*” (254). These kinds of allusions alert the reader’s consciousness and activate the racial stereotypes that have not been mentioned so far, yet that will appear in many guises until the very last moment

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<sup>407</sup> Many other quotes make the smile a *leitmotif*, such as: “watched from behind that something which could have been called smiling,” “watching from behind the smiling” (256), “behind that expression which you were not supposed to see past” (256); “again with that expression that you might call smiling but which was not, which was just something that even just a clodhopper bastard was not intended to see beyond” (263).

<sup>408</sup> This is also the glance that white racists interpreted in blacks critical of racial injustice, as when Richard Wright’s character is fired because, as his white employer tells him, “I don’t like your looks, nigger. Now, get!” in his autobiography recently published in the original complete text *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth*. 1945 (New York: HarperPerennial, 2005, 182.)

<sup>409</sup> Steve Price, “Shreve’s Bon in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Mississippi Quarterly* 39.3 (Summer 1986): 328.

when Bon's supposed real racial identity is unveiled. In this sense, we can observe a long elaboration in the narrative of the stereotype of the mulatto in its many forms, which is not explicitly named, but indicated by the codified traits of personality already present in the "Negro" and "mulatto" stereotypes of the times. All the notions of the mulatto as "passer," the mulatto as struggling with his inner tragic conflict of identity, and the mulatto threat also shared with the "Negro beasts" which mirror Sutpen's "wild niggers," are perfectly drawn in the novel and more specifically in Shreve's discourse.

In what could be read as a misleading sign, Bon's enlistment in the Confederate army is, apart from being a logical choice given his aim of "passing," a common attitude among mulattoes in the Lower South, and most especially among those with Bon's social status. As John G. Mencke reminds us, during the Civil War,

in New Orleans and Mobile, for instance, mulattoes of French and Spanish ancestry rushed to support the Confederate cause at the outbreak of hostilities, and in both cities were for a time accepted as a part of the armed forces of their respective states. There is no question that many of these light-skinned mulattoes saw their interests as linked to those of their white neighbours. They volunteered their services to protect their property and privileged position in Southern society.<sup>410</sup>

Regardless of the extent to which the racial stereotype of the mulatto is drawn in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and however important it is to provide precise historical, ideological and literary information to anchor the figure of Bon in his context, I consider it a primary goal to distinguish what his narrative functions are in the novel and how the stereotype has been transformed in its narrativization.<sup>411</sup>

To begin with, the extent to which this stereotype is active in the novel is quite impressive. From the moment Charles Bon appears, there are remarkable features of his personality that link him to fixed traits of the personality of the mulatto, such as indifference and a

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<sup>410</sup> John G. Mencke, *Mulattoes and Race Mixture: American Attitudes and Images, 1865-1918*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979, 22.

<sup>411</sup> For an interesting analysis of the evolution of interracial relations in Southern literature starting with Faulkner, specifically in the chapter dedicated to the revision of the "one-drop rule," see Suzanne W. Jones, *Race Mixing: Southern Fiction since the Sixties*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2004.

tragic destiny. The stereotype is elaborated gradually, although its elaboration is interrupted frequently by other episodes, or shifts in focus away from Charles Bon. By placing him at the centre of the narrative, Shreve emphasizes his importance and sets the starting point of the fictional construction of a character. The thoughts and words of an unknown person in the real story are provided in the tale to render Charles Bon a round character. So his development runs practically against the fixed flat form of the stereotype, although he actually fits the profile of the mulatto. Paradoxes of literature: it is certainly fiction which gives flesh and blood to the character (blood, specifically).

However, the construction of this figure is so much based upon the racial codes incorporated by the Southern Myth that the stereotype does not require naming in order to be identified.<sup>412</sup> Such an extended development intensifies the roles and significance that the racial discourse (not only racist, but also abolitionist) had attributed to the figure of the mulatto: tragedy, “passing,” and threat.

If Bon is a mixed-blood, the story invites the reader to think that he is trying to “pass.” Bon would thus be misleading his contemporaries in order to appropriate Sutpen’s white privileges. There is a correspondent function in the story and the narrative by which Bon’s deceiving of his society is paralleled by his deceiving of the reader. He is both the core of the narrative enigma and the historical enigma of the story. This is because in the historical setting of the story, nobody knows Bon’s racial identity. For long stretches in the novel Charles Bon has been constructed as a ‘nigger’ through the activation of racial stereotypes, yet by the end nobody knows whether he is white or only “passing” for white. Or, in fact, was he performing a ‘passing,’ that should be kept secret, and is therefore converted by Faulkner into the narrative enigma of *Absalom, Absalom!* The mystery is maintained until the very end of the novel, and even then it is not fully resolved, as we have seen. Furthermore, it is likely that it is not Bon who might be misleading his contemporaries—and the reader—with a fake identity, but rather Shreve that might have accused Bon of attempting to perform a “passing” by constructing him as a mulatto without the sufficient information. In this latter possibility, Shreve would have assumed the fact of Bon’s “tainted blood” no less than Jeffersonians assume Joe Christmas’. Both scenes would contribute, as Weinstein remarks, to creating an identity that “in Jefferson is lodged deeper

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<sup>412</sup> A similar effect is created with Nancy in “That Evening Sun.”

than thought, producing a community that—at its worst—assumes everything and interrogates nothing.”<sup>413</sup> Racially mysterious hearts here are just assumed to be black, and “passing” becomes the social engine of a narrative enigma.<sup>414</sup>

Tragedy and threat provide the very tone of the novel, beyond the racial meaning in the mulatto stereotype. They create an extremely intense atmosphere, inherent in the story because of its inevitably tragic outcome. Fatalism in Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha is depicted both in terms of a tragedy and in terms of an everlasting menace.<sup>415</sup> Correspondingly, the atmosphere created in *Absalom, Absalom!* is shaped throughout many characters and situations, among which we find the mulatto character as a central device. As it results from this perspective, we need to see this overwhelming atmosphere of tragedy and menace—by no means contradictory forces—as strongly shaped in the narrative by the codified functions of the stereotype of the mulatto. I am not saying here that the whole force of Sutpen’s story derives from this stereotype. Rather, Faulkner benefits here from the

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<sup>413</sup> Philip M. Weinstein, “Postmodern Intimations: Musing on Invisibility: William Faulkner, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison.” *Faulkner and Postmodernism*. Ed. John N. Duvall. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2002, 24.

<sup>414</sup> For the analysis of the act or attempts at “passing” in Faulkner’s novels, and especially of *Light in August*, see Christopher A. Lalonde, *William Faulkner and the Rites of Passage*. Macon: Mercer UP, 1996; Gena McKinley, “*Light in August*: A Novel of Passing?” *Faulkner in Cultural Context*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference, 1995. Ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1997. 148-65; Heinz Ickstadt, “The Discourse of Race and the ‘Passing’ Text: Faulkner’s *Light in August*” *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 42.4 (1997): 529-36. For general studies on the phenomenon of “passing” and literature see Juda Bennett, *The Passing Figure: Racial Confusion in Modern American Literature*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996, and *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*. Ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1996. See also M. Giulia Fabi, *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2004. Among the most relevant novels dealing with “passing”, William Wells Brown’s *Clotel; or the President’s Daughter* (1853); Charles W. Chesnutt’s *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900); James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912); Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929); Jessie Fauset’s *Plum Bun* (1928); Fannie Hurst’s *Imitation of Life* (1933).

<sup>415</sup> Melvin Seiden has a more radical point of view on this, for he feels that “In a complicated way the racism is a smokescreen, a red herring. Our thesis is then is that it is not miscegenation but the fear of miscegenation, not the thing itself but its chimerical, hallucinatory force that Faulkner is dealing with. The novel is not concerned with the tragedy of miscegenation, but with the Miscegenation Complex; it mines one of the most powerful and corrosive figments of the white imagination: the elemental dread of the idea of the black man.” (“Faulkner’s Ambiguous Negro.” *The Massachusetts Review* 4, Summer 1963, 678.)

condensation of these two functions, historically and artistically fixed in his contemporary world in the figure of the mulatto as representative of these roles in society. In any case, what I want to remark here is that the racial stereotype of the mulatto discloses these two tones that will increasingly shape the very narrative tone of the novel. Hence, this becomes one of the narrative functions of the mulatto stereotype, and one of the effects of having such a sustained and lengthy development of this stereotype.

Apart from the general effect of creating tension in the atmosphere and foreshadowing the catastrophic downfall of the Sutpen dynasty, through Charles Bon the issue of miscegenation is woven as an underlying strand of the story in two directions: his black stereotyping, and his own interracial marriage and breeding. Miscegenation will become increasingly present in the narrative when it replaces incest and familial relationships as the central conflict. While his mistress' family is an explicit mirror that will accompany the reader even after Charles Bon's death, the latter's gradual emergence as the centre of consciousness in Shreve's discourse performs the movement that also foregrounds the issue of miscegenation.

In addition to this, he activates the fears that the Haitian Revolution aroused, and that had been already suggested by Sutpen's "wild negroes." In his mirroring of their menace in a very sophisticated way, he establishes a parallelism that would link the Old South with the New South: the Haitian "wild negroes" are to slavery what the mulatto sons of southern aristocrats are to the Post-Emancipation period. Thus, Bon's menace suggests the eventual turning of the freed slave son against his family in a moment when all African Americans are known to be emancipated and where legal prohibitions of intermarriage are likely to be withdrawn—and they will be indeed for a short period of time. Aware of the racial conflict of this story, Henry will definitely eradicate his father's sin of miscegenation at the expense of precipitating the downfall of Sutpen's Hundred. Thereby, and by the contrast of this figure with his half-sister Clytie, the debate over segregation is launched. Shreve's last words will determine an eventual solution of this problem, as we are going to see later.

## b) Clytie

Like Charles Bon, Clytie is a very complex character, for which reason no single interpretation could wholly account for her. It is therefore undeniable that, although she does not speak much in the novel, she should be understood as a round character in every sense. Although Clytie is never the focus in the novel (except for her encounters with Rosa Colfield) she is always present in Sutpen's Hundred. There is a heated debate about her role in the Sutpen family that aims to understand the crucial intersection between kinship and race already mentioned as an important axis of the Southern Myth. This debate is unavoidable if we are to suggest some of the narrative functions of this character. Like Charles Bon, Clytie transcends the boundaries of the stereotypes of the mulatto character, yet combines many of its multiple features and functions.

Clytie's main secret is not so much what she indirectly reveals to Quentin, which I think is merely absent in the novel, but rather what her place in Sutpen's family is. In trying to define it, critics have debated between two historical possibilities in Southern antebellum society: she could have been born a slave and worked as a household slave as many sons and daughters of the master did;<sup>416</sup> or she might have been acknowledged and integrated into the family as another of Thomas' white children.<sup>417</sup> Both interpretations acknowledge Clytie's impressive strength and self-consciousness. Erskine Peters, for example, states about her that "Her character dominates even in those tasks which were automatically expected of her as a slave: chopping wood, keeping a kitchen, garden, harnessing the mule, plowing" (130). Peters also assumes that Faulkner is embodying in Clytie "the slave daughter of the master who remains on the family plantation in an

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<sup>416</sup> In fact, in both the Upper South and later in the Deep South the mulatto children followed the condition of the mother. That was a way to ensure that mulattoes would be slaves for the most part, since procreation between black men and white women was first greatly discouraged, then punished with a fine, and later prohibited. However, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, many fathers manumitted their mulatto children with their female slaves, contrary to what happened in the Upper South.

<sup>417</sup> John V. Hagopian, for example, states that "though Sutpen cannot publicly acknowledge Clytie as his daughter, he clearly considers her to be one of the family; . . . Clytie, however, instead of fleeing, remains behind at Sutpen's Hundred, but she does so out of filial devotion and as an equal with Judith and Rosa." ("*Absalom, Absalom!* and the Negro Question." *Modern Fiction Studies* 19.2, summer 1973, 209.)

ambiguous maternal role as a member and non-member of the family” (Davis, *Faulkner’s “Negro”* 197).<sup>418</sup> Whether a slave or an acknowledged daughter it is clear, as Davis states, that “like the other mixed-bloods in the novel, Clytie does not experience the black world as a black person,” since she “is denied access to the only two institutions available to blacks—the family and the church.” (198). If this allows Davis to remark that “her lack of affiliation with the black world illuminates Faulkner’s development of the black housekeeper-servant in his fiction, for in portraying Clytie he moves away from the character type as it appears in the earlier novels” (*Faulkner’s “Negro”* 198), her being denied access to the family can be read in contrast to Judith and Ellen’s desire to arrange a marriage for Sutpen’s white daughter. In this sense, the difference in the treatment of both daughters is clear, as much as in other details, like the fact that Judith sleeps in a bed and Clytie on a pallet, and that Sutpen kissing Judith becomes just a “Ah, Clytie” (132), when their father returns home during the Civil War. Furthermore, Gwendolyne Chabrier underlines how Clytie “se considère comme un membre à part entière de la famille Sutpen. . . . Clytie, ayant perdu toute assurance face à son père, a besoin d’affirmer son origine familiale, ce qu’elle fait en imposant son pouvoir social aux Noirs et aux pauvres Blancs, eux qui d’après le code sudiste sont ses inférieurs. Lorsqu’elle trouve, par exemple, Charles Etienne, son neveu, en train de jouer avec un garçon noir, elle se met en colère et chasse le Noir en le maudissant. De même, elle barre la porte de la cuisine à Wash.”<sup>419</sup>

Peters also remarks that Sutpen’s naming of their children establishes the division in their status. With respect to the mulatto daughter, “Judith supposedly has ultimate control over her half sister, not because she has more force of character, but because she possesses the power of her social status as a white woman, granted and protected by Yoknapatawpha culture. Symbolizing a less privileged status, Clytie is the only character without a last name. Indomitable though she is, she is denied the legitimate label of her lineage” (131). Meanwhile in most scenes where Clytie is present she is doing

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<sup>418</sup> There is a reference to her in a passage uttered by an unclear voice (which seems to be Shreve’s by his use of words and expressions) in which Clytie is considered a servant: “and Clytie too, the one remaining servant, negro, the one who would forbid him to pass the kitchen door with what he brought” (152).

<sup>419</sup> Gwendolyne Chabrier, *William Faulkner: La saga de la famille sudiste*. Paris: Librairie Séguier, 1988, 286.

domestic work around the house or the plantation, or often in the kitchen, Judith also appears with her doing the same jobs.

Nevertheless, it is through Rosa's point of view, and the episodes in her life that this character appears to the reader. Miss Rosa's most developed telling of Clytie happens in a period of confused racial roles and of the debacle of the Civil War, and after this, when the downfall of the house is already evident. In this sense, the role of this character in her society is not apparent, since it is not developed in normal antebellum circumstances. This is certainly a way of breaking with the usual flat correspondence of one character to a single stereotype, since there is an ambivalence in her character that invokes both the loyal slave stereotype and the rebellious slave stereotype. However, the Civil War provides a turning point in the novel for many reasons that Faulkner leaves unexplained. Certainly, this turning point gives him the opportunity to suggest the multiple forms of racial relationships. In Clytie, indeed, we find the paradox of a slave that does not think herself a slave but whose "legal" status is unknown to the reader. At the same time the Civil War is a moment in which slaves took their own decisions: Clytie makes hers in consonance with the stereotype of the tame servant who remains at the master's house. As Broncano points out, Clytie "is described as a 'Spanish duenna,' [(165)] who is, according to the Webster dictionary, an elderly woman serving as governess and companion to the younger ladies in a Spanish or a Portuguese family" (108), a fact that makes her status more ambiguous when translated to the U.S. context. Indeed, her attitude contains a paradox because her decision to remain is inspired by a decidedly untamed character, and a very conscious will to stay. Clytie's decision to remain shapes the complexities inherent in her enigmatic character at the same time that it challenges the assumed duality of slavery and freedom. Rosa's perspective of Clytie's attitude sets up this paradox:

*Clytie. Clytie, not inept, anything but inept: perverse inscrutable and paradox: free, yet incapable of freedom who had never once called herself a slave, holding fidelity to none like the indolent and solitary wolf or bear (yes, wild: half untamed black, half Sutpen blood: and if 'untamed' be synonymous with 'wild', then 'Sutpen' is the silent unsleeping viciousness of the tamer's lash) whose false seeming hold it docile to fear's hand but which is not, which if this be fidelity, fidelity only to the prime fixed principle of its own savageness; —Clytie who in the very pigmentation of her flesh represented that debacle which had brought Judith and me to what we were and which had made of her (Clytie) that which she declined to be just as she had declined to be that from which its purpose had been to emancipate her, as though*

*presiding aloof upon the new, she deliberately remained to represent to us the  
threatful portent of the old.* (129)

This extraordinary and complex passage accounts for the circularity inherent in all stereotypes, from Bhabha's point of view. Instead of fixing the stereotype, here Faulkner combines the multiple stereotypical features of the mulatto to illuminate the confusing paradox it contains. In this description we find both the slave and the free black; the tame and the untamed slave; the decision to stay behind and to flee; peace and threat; the savageness as well as the fidelity that run in Clytie's veins but which come from not only the "wild nigger" slave mother, but also from Sutpen himself.<sup>420</sup>

In this sense, Clytie as an incarnation of the multiple forms of the mulatto stereotype allows Miss Rosa's "process of subjectivation" (as Bhabha calls it) of Thomas Sutpen, who is at the center of her narrative. She sees Clytie as a clear racial mirror of Sutpen, and of herself too. Yet as with all racial mirrors, it shows her the negative, rejected side of their human nature. The triangle of these three characters, seen from Miss Rosa's point of view, provides the Coldfield narrator with a divided marginal identity parallel to the traditional image of the mulatto as a "marginal" individual. The idea of an active triangular relationship between these three characters is repeated through the familial ties that link these three members of the Sutpen family, as well as through the narrative episodes of racial contact and merging.

Apart from the correlation Rosa's narrative establishes between Sutpen and his black slaves in the images already commented, two episodes contain and reformulate the same idea of racial conflict through merging. All these scenes contribute to signal miscegenation as the core of the conflict in *Absalom, Absalom!*, and disclose the various impulses, feelings and problems engendered by racial contact, which have been thus far mainly constrained to the bodies of the mulatto characters.

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<sup>420</sup> The fact that African American characters are filtered through the white characters' minds and voices makes the statements and descriptions more complex and uncertain. Chabrier interprets that "Rosa avec sa mauvaise conscience estime que Clytemnestra refuse la liberté et demeure sur la plantation afin d'être le témoin et la vengeresse passive du vieux monde, à l'opposé de ce que son nom suggère." (288)

The episodes of racial contact occur both when Miss Rosa goes to Sutpen's Hundred, firstly during the Civil War, when Henry has just killed Bon; and for the second time in September 1909, when Quentin Compson brings Rosa there again in order to find out who Clytie is hiding in the mansion. There is moreover a parallel incident involving Rosa's struggle to go upstairs against Clytie's will. These two encounters are revelatory of the issues raised by miscegenation. It is worth quoting at length the first of these well-known encounters:

*Because it was not the name, the word, the fact that she had called me Rosa. . . . But it was not that. That was not what she meant at all; in fact, during that instant while we stood brush past her and reach the stair) she did me more grace and respect than anyone else I knew; I knew that from the instant I had entered that door, to her of all who knew me I was no child. 'Rosa?' I cried. 'To me? To my face?' Then she touched me, and then I did stop dead. Possibly even then my body did not stop, since I seemed to be aware of it thrusting blindly still against the solid yet imponderable weight (she not owner: instrument; I still say that) of that will to bar me from the stairs. . . . I know only that my entire being seemed to run at blind full tilt into something monstrous and immobile, with a shocking impact too soon and too quick to be mere amazement and outrage at that black arresting and untimorous hand on my white woman's flesh. Because there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as much as lovers know because it makes them both: —touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am's private own: not spirit, soul; the liquorish and ungirdled mind is anyone's to take in any darkened hallway of this earthly tenement. But let flesh touch with flesh, and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too. Yes, I stopped dead—no woman's hand, no negro's hand, but bitted bridle-curb to check and guide the furious and unbending will—I crying not to her, to it; speaking to it through the negro, the woman, only because of the shock which was not yet outrage because it would be terror soon, expecting and receiving no answer because we both knew it was not to her I spoke: 'Take your hand off me, nigger!' (115)*

This striking moment of tremendous racial tension and bewilderment contains touch as the physical connection parallel to the sexual merging of the races. The single touch makes racial divisions explode in many directions. As Thadious Davis affirms

for all the characters, touch crystallizes the 'eggshell shibboleth of caste and color' and the taboos against interracial union; touch creates, too, the necessity for southern custom and law against miscegenation (specifically here because the 'secret' of the legend is solved in terms of miscegenation—actual miscegenation from the father Sutpen and intended by the son Charles Bon). Nonetheless, southern interracial

restrictions, according to the theme of this novel, are not about preventing touch but rather about affirming all the negative implications of touch when they serve the ends of white society. (Faulkner's "Negro" 211)<sup>421</sup>

Hence, physical contact is the gesture that catalyzes the intrinsic fallacy of racial difference, since it represents the very revelation that such racial boundaries are constructed in order to support the Southern "way of life." Indeed, Miss Rosa finds herself in contact with the hand of a woman toward whom she recognizes that she feels grace and respect, but whose physical contact shows her how fragile and dangerous mere human feelings are to our own decorous ordering. As Theresa M. Towner puts it, "Rosa's body has its cultural function—it is 'white woman's flesh,' not just 'my white skin'—but that function disintegrates even as Rosa tries to assert it by calling Clytie a nigger. It is a remarkable passage in which Faulkner shows both how white racial privilege attempts to control challenges to its power and how precariously that privilege is situated."<sup>422</sup> Rosa's vision of the downfall works as a proleptic gesture of the downfall of the slaveholding society and of its microcosmic reproduction in Sutpen's dynasty. For a moment, Miss Rosa sees in Clytie an image of herself, a marginal daughter doomed to the loneliest spinsterhood, and to whom love has been denied. Both her womanhood and her marginal place in the family in relation to the father figure of Thomas Sutpen makes her feel Clytie as her own soul. Their shared gender and associated travails foster her alienation from the demon Sutpen. In turn, the power of social conventions and racist ideologies makes her react in repulsion against this communion, and return to Sutpen's legitimate white identity, her own "shell": in spite of Clytie's efforts to dissimulate her blackness, Rosa Coldfield sees in her the inferior "nigger" and rejects any kind of racial merging. Her alienation is now from Clytie. It is in this sense that we can fathom the fetish dynamics Homi Bhabha describes in relation to the stereotype: there is something in Clytie that Rosa identifies with, yet it is found in the negation and substitution of

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<sup>421</sup> Peters also draws attention to the touch (117).

<sup>422</sup> Theresa M. Towner, "Unsurprised Flesh: Color, Race, and Identity in Faulkner's Fiction." *Faulkner and the Natural World*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1996. Ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1999, 53. See especially her major study on racial representation, *Faulkner on the Color Line*. For an overview of the themes later developed in this book, see her article "'How can a black man ask?': Race and Self-Representation in Faulkner's Later Fiction." *The Faulkner Journal* 10.2 (Spring 1995): 3-21.

what she rejects. Inherent in this image of touching is the contradiction that shapes the binary structure of the stereotype. Its outcome is precisely the narcissistic confrontation which, from the moment when we are able to change our perspective, solves the inherent contradiction. Lévi-Strauss' concept of the myth, thus, provides us with a parallel structure in its dynamics: the contradiction is only solved abstractly when the two opposed forces seem alike.

The second parallel encounter between Clytie and Miss Rosa offers another more radical confrontation of the problem. The scene takes place when Quentin brings Miss Rosa to Sutpen's Hundred, more than forty years later:

And how she (Clytie) and Miss Coldfield said no word to one another, as if Clytie had looked once at the other woman and knew that that would do no good; that it was to him, Quentin, that she turned, putting her hand on his arm and saying, "Don't let her go up there, young marster." And how maybe she looked at him and knew that would do no good either, because she turned and overtook Miss Coldfield and caught her arm and said, "Don't you go up there, Rosie" and Miss Coldfield struck the hand away and went on toward the stairs . . . and Clytie said "Rosie" and ran after the other again, whereupon Miss Coldfield turned on the step and struck Clytie to the floor with a full-armed blow like a man would have, and turned and went on up the stairs. She (Clytie) lay on the bare floor of the scaling and empty hall like a small shapeless bundle of quiet clean rags. When he reached her he saw that she was quite conscious, her eyes wide open and calm; he stood above her, thinking, 'Yes. She is the one who owns the terror.' (303)

Miss Coldfield has learned the lesson and will not confront again the feeling of identification with a "nigger," and so in this moment of reassertion she hits Clytie, who falls down with an expression of the Conradian horror that bred her.<sup>423</sup> As a mulatto daughter her privileges are denied at very crucial moments in her life. In striking Clytie, Miss Rosa violently rejects any racial contact, and therefore in her gesture she contains the New South's force of hostility toward interracial mixture. Thus, in Minrose Gwin's words, "Rosa's failure to respond to

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<sup>423</sup> It is worth noting here how much this last sentence recalls, Kurtz's "The horror, The horror!" (Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness." *Youth and Two Other Stories*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924, 149), and how this in turn recalls the last sentence of *Absalom, Absalom!*

Clytie is the paradoxical tragedy of the Old South itself, and of all its white women who could never move beyond their own shackles of racism to feel the humanity of their black sister's touch or the need for connection and recognition it signified."<sup>424</sup> In this sense, Davis' idea that touch is finally made to illuminate the negative consequences of racial contact is coherent with this last episode, thereby contributing to the proleptic function of the successive reformulation of the theme of racial contact. The issue evolves in the narrative to negate the possible identification between the races, and to point out miscegenation as the sin which precipitates the downfall of Sutpen's Hundred, just as Shreve will argue by the end of the novel.

Clytie's actions do not represent any kind of threat to the Sutpens. She thinks of them as family, and thus lives with them, loves them, helps them and defends them. In this aspect of her personality she fits many times over the stereotype of the loyal and dearest house servant, along with other Faulknerian characters, above all Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury*.<sup>425</sup>

In regards to the tragic mulatto stereotype, Walter Taylor identifies two moments where Clytie's tragic identity surfaces: when she transmits "her own tragic ambivalence to Velery," and when at the end she burns Sutpen's Hundred with herself and Henry inside.<sup>426</sup> Suicide is not an uncommon end for mulattos in literature, yet her act is once again ambivalent. It can be interpreted as her last reaction against a broken life or as "a kind of dual expiation on the part of both races in the South and particularly on the part of the planter class"

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<sup>424</sup> Minrose C. Gwin, *Black and White Women of the Old South: The Peculiar Sisterhood in American Literature*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1985, 116. In another article, Gwin explores racial woundings in the novel and qualifies Rosa's reactions in these passages as "racial wounds" inflicted on Clytie: "Racial Wounding and the Aesthetics of the Middle Voice in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*." *The Faulkner Journal* 20.1/2 (Fall 2004): 30.

<sup>425</sup> For a very intelligent analysis of the figure of the "mammy" black servant in William Faulkner and Toni Morrison, see, above all, Philip M. Weinstein, *What else but love?: The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and Morrison*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996. On a very indulgent perspective of Clytie, see Régine Robin, "Absalom, Absalom!" *Le Blanc et le Noir chez Melville et Faulkner*. Ed. Vida Sachs. Paris: Mouton, 1974.

<sup>426</sup> Walter Taylor, *Faulkner's Search for a South*. Urbana, Chicago, London: U of Illinois P, 1983, 112. See how the author very interestingly discloses many suggestions that arise from "Clytie's secret." See also, Taylor's previous exploration of racial representation in his article "Faulkner's Pantaloon: The Negro Anomaly at the Heart of *Go Down Moses*." *American Literature* 44.3 (1972): 430-444.

(Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro"* 206). On the other hand, her burning of Sutpen's mansion could be interpreted as revenge for her marginal position in the family, and her ultimate gesture is to bring an end to the Sutpen dynasty.

Even though her tragic character subtly emerges, Clytie almost always appears as the strongest of the women, who mainly helps Judith, toward whom she acts like a sister on many occasions. Her benevolent disposition towards her, and her industriousness contribute to establish a personal relationship with her white half-sister that "provides a model of sibling cooperation and harmony in the novel, and by extension it suggests the possibility of a different order of social interaction between races in the South" (Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro"* 201).<sup>427</sup> In this sense, and based on other examples provided, Clytie can be regarded as a nexus between the two races, the embodiment of a placid relationship not disrupted by the Civil War. This actually appeals to the contemporary paternalistic strand of racial discourse in the South, which supported and sympathized with those blacks that remained loyal and obedient to their white former masters. Hence, Clytie also contributes to keeping alive the flame of debate between those who believed blacks were dangerous and those who trusted them in their inferior submissive status.

At the same time, however, Clytie is perceived as threatening to Miss Rosa for resembling her too much in their repeated confrontation. This is the way she indirectly poses a threat to the "eggshell" of antebellum Southern racial boundaries, which will become the very cornerstone of the New South's struggle to maintain racial privileges. Her indirect menace is related to her being a female, in contrast to Bon's direct threat performed in his search of the father and his defiant determination to marry his white sister Judith in a patriarchal society in which women were relegated to a secondary rank.

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<sup>427</sup> Along with this idea, Sean Lathan is more straightforward in denying Clytie's inferior status in the family: "Clytie, however, comes to occupy a special position in the household, becoming more of a matronly sister than a slave. This is not because she fulfills the role of a mammy-like care-giver but because Sutpen quite clearly loves her as one of his own children. Thus, upon his return from the war, he greets her with the same affection he offers to Judith and Rosa. Yet her presence and her position within the house clearly challenge the expected preservation of a stark racial divide." ("Jim Bond's America: Denaturalizing the Logic of Slavery in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Mississippi Quarterly* 51.3, Summer 1998, 461.)

### c) Other mulatto characters

In addition to the major mulatto characters, other mixed-blood ones appear in the novel in a much flatter adherence to the mulatto stereotypes of the times. Among them, Bon's octoroon mistress very much fits the stereotype of the tragic mulatta of New Orleans, as described by Judith Berzon. Her depiction is a byproduct of Mr Compson's imagining Henry when seeing her for the first time in New Orleans:

and the country boy with his simple and erstwhile untroubled code in which females were ladies or whores or slaves looked at the apotheosis of the two doomed races presided over by its own victim—a woman with a face like a tragic magnolia, the eternal female, the eternal Who-suffers; the child, the boy, sleeping in silk and lace to be sure yet complete chattel of him who, begetting him, owned him body and soul to sell (if he chose) like a calf or puppy or sheep. (95)

Her presence at Charles Bon's graveside is marked by crying from deep sadness and desolation. Her son, Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, accompanies her and will be returned to Sutpen's Hundred once his mother has disappeared or died. The octoroon can be seen as parallel with Clytie insofar as she meets the tragic feminine stereotype. As compared to the violent masculine stereotype of the mulatto, Chabrier describes its feminine counterpart:

Alors que l'archétype tragique représente essentiellement l'éclatement psychologique, l'archétype féminin de la mulâtresse «tragique» semble être un pur effet de l'injustice sociale, mais doit, néanmoins, à cause de son ascendance noire, affronter les interdits sociaux quand se pose la question du mariage. (277)

Charles Etienne's story, on the other hand, would deserve a longer analysis than the one I am able to offer here, since this figure concentrates also in a very singular way—and with an extraordinary force—the stereotype of mulatto crisis. Nonetheless, I can indicate here what his functions seem to be in general, even though I should not digress to include the crisis experience itself. In short, Charles Etienne is brought to Sutpen's Hundred when he is an adolescent, and his life is shaken to its foundation because the rules of the South contrast very much with those of New Orleans. His character is in some ways a continuation of the opposition Bon-Clytie, since he is

almost white, “with light bones and womanish hands” (165), a delicate fragile boy for whom a change of clothes would conjure up the loss of his origins, to the point that Mr Compson sighs when describing how Clytie and Judith found a broken mirror in his garret: “who to know what hours of amazed and tearless grief he might have spent before it, examining himself in the delicate and outgrown tatters in which he perhaps could not even remember himself, with quiet and incredulous incomprehension”(165).<sup>428</sup> When judged because he attacked some blacks at a party, the judge prompts him with the real question: “*What are you? Who and where did you come from?*” (168) His fluid and disorienting sense of identity results from his sudden understanding of the conflict of race relations:

And your grandfather did not know either just which of them it was who told him that he was, must be, a negro, who could neither have heard yet not recognized the term ‘nigger’, who even had no word for it in the tongue he knew who had been born and grown up in a padded silken vacuum cell which might have been suspended on a cable of thousand fathoms in the sea, where pigmentation had no more moral value than the silk walls and the scent the rose-colored candle shades, where the very abstractions which he might have observed—monogamy and fidelity and decorum and gentleness and affection—were as purely rooted in the flesh’s offices as the digestive processes. (165)

As a reaction to this crisis of identity, Charles Etienne will take refuge within a black community, and will come back once he has obtained a dark black-skinned wife. As one of the common possibilities of the mulatto character, the man turns to the black race reacting against Clytie’s warnings against mixing with them. The opportunity of “passing” for white is thus, in his case, clearly rejected, in contrast to his father’s attempt to marry Sutpen’s white daughter. The fateful consequences of his decision to return to his socially attributed black racial origins will serve as proof of the terrible destiny of interracial relations, when the story assumes the racist belief in the degeneration of the races in the fourth generation of interbreeding, in the character of Jim Bond. Mr Compson offers a resentful reading of Charles Etienne’s decision to reject his white blood when he describes his wife as a “coal black and ape-like woman” (171), or on another occasion

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<sup>428</sup> See Charles H. Nilon’s *Faulkner and the Negro* (New York: Citadel Press, 1965) for an exploration of clothes as a stereotypical reference to the “Negro” as a social construct in Faulkner’s work.

“an authentic wife resembling something in a zoo,” “his wife, the black gargoyle” (173). As Mencke observes, this attitude was common, since

A marked shift in this attitude [of being seen as a middle race and sharing some white privileges], however, seems to have taken place during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Many upper-class mulattoes abandoned their detached posture and freely joined in supporting the Negro and his cause. A survey of prominent Negro leaders in Reconstruction, both at the state and national level, indicates that most were of mixed blood. (22)

Charles Etienne’s profound racial consciousness makes him challenge the racial boundaries just as Joe Christmas does in *Light in August*. His is an attitude of rage against racial divisions in many ways, the real space of the “marginal man”:

The man apparently hunting out situations in order to flaunt and fling the ape-like body of his charcoal companion in the faces of all and any who would retaliate: the negro stevedores and deckhands on steamboats or in city honky-tonks who thought he was a white man and believed it only the more strongly when he denied it; the white men with body and limbs almost as light and delicate as a girl’s giving the first blow, usually unarmed and heedless of the numbers opposed to him, with that same fury and implacability and physical imperviousness to pain and punishment, neither cursing nor panting, but laughing. (171)

Charles Etienne’s figure and story in *Absalom, Absalom!* strongly reinforces the two mentioned stereotypes of the tragic and the menacing mulatto. In his attitude there is the revenge of the outcast, whose “Negro blood” is strongly emphasized not only by his own adoption of the blacks’ life (taking a black wife, and a rebuilt slave-quarter as a house), but also through the stereotypes that shape his character and attitude, a sophisticated yet stereotyped way of challenging the segregated society: laughing and a violent attitude. His trajectory, though in many ways divergent from Bon’s, helps to consolidate the potential threat that originates in their common tragic fate, which in some cases becomes the power of destruction. Thus, Charles Etienne fits the traditional stereotype of the mulatto, but his “Negro blood” is much more emphasized in a negative sense. This development of a figure parallel to his father demonstrates how extremely limited the “mulatto” is in his options. Both “passing” and

returning to the black race prove a failure, and thus murder and early death from a highly symbolical “yellow fever” makes *Absalom, Absalom!* participate of the mulatto literary tradition. The characters’ ends affect the perception of miscegenation in the novel as a whole, as we are going to see later.

Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, thus, works both as a counterpoint and mirror figure of Charles Bon. The development of his story in Chapter VI in Quentin’s mind reactivates the stereotype of the mulatto in the reader’s mind. The fact that this story is presented all at once in this chapter, from beginning to end, enables the novel as a whole to instruct its readers about the fate of light-skinned mulattoes who attempt “passing,” once it is discovered they are not white. Charles Etienne’s marginalization, bewilderment and isolation from Southern society in contrast to his native New Orleans becomes an anticipation of what Bon’s life would have been like once he was uncovered as “nigger,” and thus his aim at “passing” frustrated. This story crafted out of its conforming to well-established racial stereotypes thus becomes the eventual and never realized future of Bon’s story. Nevertheless, the reader has no clue yet that would suggest that Bon is black. Neither is he or she acquainted with the construction of Bon as character. By placing this story clearly before Bon’s characterization in Chapter VIII, yet still very close to it, the novel manages to activate the story of the mulattoes in the South, as well as to provide the reader with crucial information so that she or he can foresee Bon’s critical identity once he has been defined as a “nigger.” As we have already noticed, Charles Etienne’s life mirrors in many ways what will be Charles Bon’s story later in the novel. The contrast between New Orleans and the South is foreshadowed again here, and particularly focuses on “the issue of assimilation versus segregation of the creole as it was defined and discussed in the political discourse of American nationalism between 1803 and the beginning of the Civil War” (Ladd, “The Direction 232).

There is a narrative strategy working here that allows us to see the similarities between Charles Bon and Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon’s lives forming a never ending circle. Time in the narrative and time in the story are inverted and this ensures a recurrent fate for the mulatto character: in the time of the narrative, Charles Etienne’s characterization appears in the telling before Charles Bon’s until its ultimate consequences. This means that this story has a clear

anticipatory function, it works as one of the many repetitions on which the novel's narrative is based; however, in the time of the story, we find that Charles Etienne's story, in fact, parallels and follows that of his father. Yet, instead of focusing on the search for the father—which Bon has chronologically already pursued, lead by his mother's hand—Charles Bon's son makes his racial identity the central focus of his personal development. He thus places himself at the point where we have left Bon, that is, the moment in which the white figures know he is black, and that "passing" has already been discarded as an option. In this sense, Charles Bon's aim of "passing" results in Charles Etienne Saint Valery Bon's rejection of repeating his father's story. Instead, "he had not resented his black blood so much as he had denied the white, and this with a curious and outrageous exaggeration" (171). However, this neither allows him to have a normal status in society, nor does it provide him with a sense of inclusion in these communities. Seen from this angle this is a story of imprisonment in one's identity, one that does not have a specific place in society yet: Charles Etienne's story is both a repetition and a foreshadowing of that of his father, Charles Bon. As readers, we see the failure of the negation of one's white blood first, and the tragic, bloody results of the attempts to "pass" later, which in fact are followed again by the son's decision to attempt to identify with blacks: the circle of alternating racial identities is constructed. But this is a vicious circle, which deprives mulattoes of any future.<sup>429</sup>

Hence, this episode and its central figure strengthen and intensify Charles Bon's story so that the reader is prepared to understand the tragic sense and the terms of the racial menace which Bon's represents by the moment when Bon's racial identity is disclosed. This is, again, one of the stages when the racial conflict gradually moves to the

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<sup>429</sup> I have to insert here a public complaint dealing with fatalism, along with other stereotypes used by white writers in contemporary literature, written by Faulkner's contemporary Benjamin Brawley in his book *The Negro in Literature and Art in the United States*: "There is just one thing to be said about the portrayal of the Negro in literature by persons who are not members of the race, and that is that there is undue emphasis on futility and fatalism. It is significant that several of the books of fiction mentioned in their titles the offensive word 'nigger.' The upstanding, industrious, self-respecting Negro who actually succeeds in the battle of life, is not mentioned. Instead there are constantly recurrent the fallacies that the education of the Negro has been a failure and that the integrity of the womanhood of the race is always open to question. No matter how much evidence to the contrary there may be, any author of the day is likely to start out with one or the other of these assumptions." (New York: Duffield & Company, 1930, 212.)

foreground of the narrative. Finally, this figure meets that of Bon in relation to how the mulatto's actions intervene in the racial system of the South, thus intensifying the contrast to Clytie's passive preservation of the established order by assuming the servile and maternal role, and not asking for any white privileges.

The novel's perception of Jim Bond, the last surviving son of the Sutpen dynasty, is mainly focused on his relation to Shreve's final prophecy on miscegenation in the South and the world in general. That is why I will return to him in the next section. The last secondary character, Eulalia, is a product of Shreve's imagination, a character desolated by the loss of her husband, and full of the desire to avenge her child—resembling in many aspects Roxana in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*—and even imagined by Shreve as a cynical person at the moment Henry tells her that Judith is in love with Bon. This laughing creole, anxious and revengeful, serves Shreve to elaborate Bon's search for his father's acknowledgment, as well as his pitiful childhood. Besides, her créolité not only marks her life with the tragic fate of the mulattas already seen in the novel, but it strongly suggests the idea of possible incest among the siblings Charles Bon and Judith Sutpen, an example that reinforces Diane Roberts' argument that “while Faulkner's narratives try to reject the cultural discourses surrounding black women's sexuality that allow, even encourage, rape, they situate the sexual exploitation of young black women not as a crime against *women* but as a crime against the family: incest.”<sup>430</sup>

By way of conclusion, the mulatto characters that surround the central figures of Charles Bon and Clytie rely on the traditional stereotypes to create both an atmosphere of tragedy and threat, which anticipate the appearance of Bon on the stage. They act to inform the reader about the situation of mulattoes in the South, and function as proleptic episodes that would repeat Bon's potential story. The mulatto population in Sutpen's story significantly contributes to deepen the importance of race relations in the novel, and especially the issue of miscegenation.

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<sup>430</sup> Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood*. Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1994, 70. The most clear example in which the mulatta establishes the link between miscegenation and incest in Faulkner's work is *Go Down, Moses*.

## 5. 4. The House Divided versus the House United, or miscegenation as a prophetic sin

Even though the very pamphlet which brought the word “miscegenation” into circulation appeared to strongly encourage it as something natural; in actuality it constituted a clear provocation that indicates that in the United States, and especially in the South, interracial sexual intercourse and marriage were strongly discouraged. In 1863 an anonymous author wrote a pamphlet entitled “Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races Applied to the American White Man and Negro,” which coined the term for an already recognized phenomenon of “miscegenation,” and another one, “melaleukation” specifically referring to the interracial union of white and black races. The author’s conclusion was, as quoted and explained by Sidney Kaplan, that

‘no race can long endure without commingling of its blood with that of other races.’ Human progress itself depends on miscegenation and ‘Providence has kindly placed on the American soil . . . four millions of colored people’ for that purpose. It will be ‘our noble prerogative to set the example of this rich blending of blood.’<sup>431</sup>

However, and after provoking a heated response, the pamphlet was recognized as a hoax. As Sundquist explains, the authors, who were in fact proslavery, “represented the pamphlet as the work of an abolitionist, in hopes of discrediting the Republican party in the upcoming elections,” and thus contributed to the reading of Lincoln’s purposes as applauding miscegenation (*Faulkner: The House Divided* 108). Meanwhile miscegenation was permitted in the early antebellum period in the Lower South, and mulattoes had a specially recognized status in the major cities of Charleston and New Orleans; the increasing number of slave mulattoes, the problems with the prohibition of traffic in slaves and its economic outcomes, and the growth of racial discourse determined the tendency towards a redefinition of interracial mixture. This was mainly enforced after the

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<sup>431</sup> Sidney Kaplan “[Miscegenation].” *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Sutpen Family*. Ed. Arthur F. Kinney. New York and London: G.K. Hall & Co. and Prentice Hall International, 1996, 98.

1830s, yet legal prohibitions of interracial marriage had been passed since the end of the seventeenth-century.<sup>432</sup> As Mencke notes,

Growing numbers of persons with predominantly white blood were being held as slaves. . . . The only way for white Southerners to resolve this paradox was through a redefinition of whiteness and blackness, and this is precisely the direction in which white thought was moving by the eve of the Civil War. White meant free, black meant slave. No middle ground existed for those of both black and white blood. The white man's solution, in essence, was to say that the latter simply did not exist. By classifying as black all who had any degree of black blood—by insisting that 'one drop' of black blood was enough to make an individual a Negro—whites conventionally did away with the mulatto as an anomaly in their racial schema. If whiteness meant pure white, then those of mixed blood were, by definition, not white. Within the increasingly biracial classification system of American race relations, mulattoes thereby were thrust into the black race. For whites this served a dual purpose: it essentially erased the sin of miscegenation, since they were denying the whiteness of mulattoes; and it dispelled the uneasiness generated by the thought of enslaving people who possessed the blood of the superior race. Mulattoes and blacks were ultimately all the same in white eyes, and would be treated as such. (20)

Hence, miscegenation becomes defiance of the established slaveholding society and its elimination the primary goal of the segregation period. If laws discouraging interracial sexual intercourse go back to the seventeenth century in states like Virginia, the main way to avoid the problems associated with the acknowledgement of miscegenation and the existence of mulattoes in the Lower South was to increase the legislation that proscribed all emancipation, including that of the slave mulatto children—often the master's biological offspring—during the last decades of the antebellum period (Mencker

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<sup>432</sup> For a brief introduction to the anti-miscegenation laws in the U. S., see the first chapter of Kinney's *Amalgamation!* His chapters develop the cultural and legal resistance to miscegenation in relation to the literature of the times. For a clear discussion of the crucial moments during the antebellum period in which the idea of miscegenation was heatedly discussed, and for a tracing of popular descriptions and pictorial representations of interracial sex and couplings, and both aspects in relationship to the production of a culture in the U.S. ready to approve racial inequality, see Elise Lemire, *"Miscegenation": Making Race in America*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002.

10). Legislation increased rapidly during the last decades of the century as part of the Jim Crow laws.<sup>433</sup>

These brief notes on miscegenation allow us to understand Eric Sundquist's claim for the centrality of miscegenation during and after the Civil War in the South:

Without slighting powerful political and economic explanations of both the Civil War and Jim Crow that may in the end be more factually convincing, it is not misleading to consider that, just as the war itself only came in progress to be a struggle for emancipation, so in the longer run and in retrospect, it came to be a struggle over the far-reaching, hopelessly complex and paradoxical issue of miscegenation. (*Faulkner* 98)

William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* pays tribute to this major conflict at the heart of the Southern myth throughout the novel, yet with a striking intensity by its closure.<sup>434</sup> The direct formulation of the issue of miscegenation at the end contrasts with the subtle way of weaving the threads of the familial and racial stories of the Sutpens, and thus the effect of the novel's conclusions is to simultaneously open its story to the universal meaning of the origins of man and constrain its broader signification to the racial axis. Shreve is in charge of pronouncing the dreadful conclusions made possible by his imagery of the South. After telling the whole story and discovering that Bon actually seemed to be black, in chapter IX the story moves to Quentin and Rosa's visit to Sutpen's Hundred as remembered by Quentin, and ends focusing on Charles Etienne Saint Valery Bon's son, Jim Bond.

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<sup>433</sup> There are some books that help trace the anti-miscegenation legislation: for a summary of the legislation concerning discrimination by 'race' in each state, see Paul Murray, ed. and comp., *State's Laws on Race and Color*. 1951. Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1997; with regards to the distinctions between interracial sex and interracial domestic relationships, and the comparison between law and practice, see Charles Frank Robinson II, *Dangerous Liaisons: Sex and Love in the Segregated South*. Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 2003.

<sup>434</sup> On the different treatment of miscegenation in the Americas in the literature of the last decades of the twentieth century, and for a study of the evolving meanings of miscegenation see the interesting comparative chapter by Earl E. Fitz, "From Blood to Culture. Miscegenation as Metaphor for the Americas." *Mixing Race, Mixing Culture: Inter-American Literary Dialogues*. Ed. Monika Kaup and Debra J. Rosenthal. Austin: U of Texas P, 2002, 243-72. For a specific study of the nineteenth century, see Cassandra Jackson, *Barriers between Us: Interracial sex in Nineteenth Century American Literature*. Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana UP, 2004.

The frame narrator tells Quentin's experiences, yet is very close to Quentin's own perspective, as he focuses on Jim:

—and he, Jim Bond, the scion, the last of his race, seeing it too now and howling with human reason now since now even he could have known what he was howling about. But they couldn't catch him. They could hear him; he didn't seem to ever get any further away but they couldn't get any nearer and maybe in time they could not even locate the direction of the howling anymore. . . . and there was only the sound of the idiot negro left. (309)

Shreve continues his narrative at this point, repeating the image of this boy

“And she went to bed because it was all finished now, there was nothing left now, nothing out there but that idiot boy to lurk around those ashes and those four gutted chimneys and howl until someone came and drove him away. They couldn't catch him and nobody ever seemed to make him go very far away, he just stopped howling for a little while. Then after a while they would begin to hear him again. And so she died.” (309)

The next thing Shreve says reminds us of the aforementioned mythical frame: “‘The South,’ Shreve said. ‘The South. Jesus. No wonder you folks all outlive yourselves by years and years and years,’” which allows Quentin to see it, since “it was becoming quite distinct; he would be able to decipher the words soon, in a moment; even almost now, now, now. ‘I am older at twenty than a lot of people who have died’” (310).

The undying Southern Myth allows Shreve to figure out his own syllogism about the downfall of the Sutpen dynasty:

“So it took Charles Bon and his mother to get rid of old Tom, and Charles Bon and the octoroon to get rid of Judith, and Charles Bon and Clytie to get rid of Henry; and Charles Bon's mother and Charles Bon's grandmother got rid of Charles Bon. So it takes two niggers to get rid of one Sutpen, dont it?” (310)

Here, Shreve makes a direct claim for a particular reading of the story that accuses the African American members of the destruction of the white family. Shreve is ready to go even further, as he tells Quentin

“Which is all right, it’s fine; it clears the whole ledger, you can tear all the pages out and burn them, except for one thing. And do you know what that is?” Perhaps he hoped for an answer this time, or perhaps he merely paused for emphasis, since he got no answer. “You’ve got one nigger left. One nigger Sutpen left. Of course you cant catch him and you dont even always see him and you never will be able to use him. But you’ve got him there still. You still hear him at night sometimes. Dont you?”

“Yes,” Quentin said. (311)

Shreve’s exaggerated passionate tone in bringing out the terror of miscegenation incarnated in the howling idiot Sutpen who evades every attempt at catching him is driven further to a prophecy involving humankind as a whole, and white racial purity in particular:

“And do you know what I think?” Now he did expect an answer, and now he got one:

“No,” Quentin said.

“Do you want to know what I think?”

“No,” Quentin said.

“Then I’ll tell you. I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it wont quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they wont show up so sharp against the snow. But it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings.”

Probing the panic instilled in an anxious Southern mind by this most extreme Southern nightmare, Shreve discloses the very contradiction of the Southern myth as he prompts Quentin with the question “Why do you hate the South?” to which, as we have already seen, he replies: “I don’t hate it,” Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; ‘I don’t hate it,’ he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*” (311).

As Noel Polk states Shreve has a “clichéd reduction of America’s race problems to a single, simple, issue. Shreve is, of course, a Canadian, an outsider with no experience of the South but what he has learned from Quentin, but who nevertheless presumes to sum up the South’s problems in a clever rhetorical flourish.”<sup>435</sup> Indeed, three arguments

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<sup>435</sup> Noel Polk, *Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1996, 233.

very much anchored in the racial discourse of the South make their appearance in Shreve's final conclusion, again framed by the Myth of the South. First, we find the idea that mulatto children by white masters were the agents that destroyed the white planters' families. Shreve refers to the mulatto Sutpens as "niggers," which agrees with Southern classification from the last decades of the antebellum period, during the Civil War and after.

Secondly, the frame narrator but mostly Shreve's focusing of Jim Bond proves the widely held belief that repeated interracial mixture ultimately leads to the degeneration of the race. As Berzon explains

Many scientists asserted that race mixture between widely different peoples would lead to "disharmonies"—to physical, mental, and emotional deformities. The belief in hybrid degeneration (i.e., the idea that the offspring of race mixture inherit none of the good qualities of either of the parental stocks and thus are likely to die off in several generations) was a commonly held belief. Even those who did not accept the theory of racial disharmonies objected to miscegenation on the ground that races differ in innate intelligence and that the offspring of such unions would have lower intelligence than full-blooded whites. (25)

It was believed that the fourth generation usually produced a degenerated individual, and this is why the frame narrator and afterwards Shreve portray an "idiot negro" howling and hiding, and breeding like an animal. This argument is sharpened after the Civil War, as Sundquist explains:

Van Evrie's theory of degeneration depended on detecting a "similarity of species" between the mulatto and the mule (they have the same etymology), one that results in a "diminishing vitality," a "tendency to disease and disorganization," and an eventual sterility among the "mongrel" element, and therefore insures that it will never be "of sufficient amount to threaten the safety or even disturb the peace of Southern society". . . . When the book was published before the war, the theory of degeneration (with its biblical sanction of punishment unto the fourth generation) was a scathing critique to slaveholding miscegenation; after the war, it could only appear to express as well an ironic rationalization of the counter-threat abolition seemed to entail. Van Evrie was not whistling in the dark, however, for at a social and psychological level the punishment of the third and fourth generations (of all generations) was real indeed—so real that Faulkner himself would seek resource to a figure of physiological

degeneration in order to describe the dilemma of Jim Bond, the fourth-generation descendant in *Absalom, Absalom!* of his family's "original sin," whose unintelligible howling unites the novel's disparate voices and engulfs their frantic attempts to salvage the Sutpen dynasty in a single anguished cry. (*Faulkner* 110)

Indeed, the animalization formerly activated in the presentation of Sutpen's slaves is sketched again in Jim Bond's descriptions. Gene Bluestein believes this is not an isolated example in Faulkner's work, where "the experiment of breeding brings together elements meant to be segregated and the results are disastrous. . . . It is this combination which leads to the idiocy that ultimately defines the illicit mixture."<sup>436</sup> The previous statement of degeneration in a "bleached" mulatto boy, yet an idiot and crying like an animal, has the function of pointing towards another commonplace of racist discourse, which claimed that miscegenation would make the white race disappear.<sup>437</sup>

Biological racial arguments like the one above were fundamental to the set of justifications for the imposition of segregationist laws in the

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<sup>436</sup> Gene Bluestein, "Faulkner and Miscegenation." *Arizona Quarterly* 43.2 (Summer 1987): 154.

<sup>437</sup> For a collection of historical writings on biological racism and the outcomes of miscegenation see John David Smith, ed., "Racial Determinism and the Fear of Miscegenation Pre-1900 and Racial Determinism and the Fear of Miscegenation Post-1900. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993. Vols. 7 and 8 of *Anti-Black Thought, 1863-1925: "The Negro Problem"*. 11 vols. See especially the details of the arguments and Faulkner's reception of them, though not necessarily focused on *Absalom, Absalom!*, in Michael Wainwright's chapters 5 and 6 in *Darwin and Faulkner's Novels: Evolution and Southern Fiction*. New York: Palgrave, 2008. It is also worth calling attention the counterpart of the argument of the possible disappearance of the purity of the 'white race' to support anti-miscegenation laws: some people—including Faulkner at a certain point, *Essays* 215, and *Lion* 182, 258—argued that it was the purity of the 'black race' that was endangered by miscegenation, and later integration. Ironically, this is in fact what the Census Bureau predicted in 1918, seeing that at least three-fourths of all blacks in the United States were racially mixed. (See F. James Davis, *Who is black?* 57). Yet the fallacy of the racial argument was a trap in itself which lead to equally absurd policies that would finally lead to the one-drop rule. This is seen by the fact that "after the 1920 census, no further attempt was made to count the number of visible mulattoes, partly because there were so many of them, but also because so many persons with some black ancestry appeared white." (*Ibid.*) The fear of miscegenation conceived in biological terms endured at least until 1947, when senator and twice governor of Mississippi, Theodore G. Bilbo wrote *Take your Choice: Separation or Mongrelization* (Poplarville: Dream House, 1947.)

New South after Reconstruction.<sup>438</sup> There is a complicated point that I wish to make here. In his excellent book *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism*, Walter Benn Michaels demonstrates that in the 1920s and 1930s the idea of race was embraced, albeit ambivalently, in a context in which “race” was defined not so much for the purpose of establishing a hierarchy in which the Black race would be inferior to the White, but rather to underpin a nascent pluralism where “race” indicated “difference,” not inferiority or superiority. Michaels shows how “race” became a “cultural” distinction by displacing the biological foundations that had earlier defined the concept, and substituting a new concept to which the “New Negro” project contributed much by shaping an identity that would allow a responsive attitude against a discriminatory segregation.<sup>439</sup> Although this convincing idea further complicates our perceptions of William Faulkner’s representations of “race” in his novels, Michaels nevertheless remarks in a fine essay dealing precisely with *Absalom, Absalom!* that

the obsession with miscegenation requires an absolute commitment to the racial difference that is the condition of miscegenation’s possibility, and many recent critics have read the texts that in my view perform this obsession (not only in *Absalom, Absalom!* but, of course, in *Light in August*) as, in fact, attacks on the very idea of racial difference. . . .

But it is, of course, of the essence of the American rule of racial identity—the one-drop rule—that blood, not skin is dispositive, and no one adheres to this rule more rigorously than Faulkner. . . .

Insofar, then, as racial identity in Faulkner is a matter of blood, it’s hard to see anything antiessentialist or social constructionist about it. At the same time, however, it’s even harder to see how relocating race from the skin to the blood can help make the racial identity of people like Joe Christmas and Charles Bon more visible. For it’s not as if Christmas’ black blood really looks any different from his or anybody’s else’s white blood. In fact, of course, the color of his blood is even less useful than the color of his skin in revealing his race. Rather than masking your racial identity visible, what the recourse to blood seems really to do is preserve its invisibility, and it is just this

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<sup>438</sup> See the historical studies on the period of segregation in C. Vann Woodward’s classic, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2002 [1955]; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*; and the more recent one, Jerrold M. Packard, *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow*. New York: St. Martins Griffin, 2002.

<sup>439</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995.

invisibility (insisted upon by Faulkner) that constitutes the condition of racial essentialism.<sup>440</sup>

Indeed, miscegenation as presented by Faulkner can only be understood as “biological” or related to “blood ancestry.” This, however, does not in fact contradict the argument that the ideas of “race” underlying Faulkner’s representation of it are in part very dependant on a definition of “races” which presumes mostly “cultural” differences (so differences in behavior, attitude, qualities and defects of personality, skills, or habits). In general, rather than seeing biological assumptions of race as definitively substituted by cultural features in the definition of “race” in the 1920s and 1930s, we can understand them as overlapping, at times used in combination, and at others alternating with each other in Faulkner’s fiction. In fact, this partly seems to function in this fashion in the Jim Crow system, since the criteria for defining “blackness” very frequently rely on definitions that are either biological or cultural, which often appear interchangeable. In any case, in *Absalom, Absalom!* it is rather the cultural features that were embodied in the stereotypes of the mulatto character, already described, which conduct the process of foreshadowing that greatly contributes not only to disclosing Charles Bon’s blackness but also, more importantly, to settling on miscegenation as cause of the extinction of the race, and the resolution of the narrative enigma. Miscegenation, which is biologically understood, has been unveiled through the narrative mainly by activating a cultural understanding of “race” that superposes an essentialist view of what is believed to be an inherited “race.”

Going back to the novel’s ending, however, if we follow Richard Godden’s illuminating intertextual association between Quentin’s last words, including his previous “Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace. Nevermore. Nevermore” (307), with Poe’s poem “The Raven,” Jim Bond’s image as recalled by Shreve to weave his last conclusion directly transforms into the black bird of Jim Crow in the novel’s final words.<sup>441</sup> For the reasons I have already pointed out with

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<sup>440</sup> Walter Been Michaels, “*Absalom, Absalom!*: The Difference between White Men and White Men.” *Faulkner in the Twenty-First Century*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2000. Ed. Robert W. Hamblin and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2003, 149.

<sup>441</sup> See Godden, *Fictions of Labor* 70-1. See also his analysis of “The Raven” and its powerful suggestion of blackness in “Poe and the Poetics of Opacity: Or, Another Way of Looking at That Black Bird.” *ELH* 67.4 (Winter 2000): 993-1009.

regards to the relationship between anti-miscegenation and segregation, and especially in the light of this ending, there is no question that Faulkner's novel injects the contemporary debate on the Jim Crow segregation system, a model of society that had already been denounced in the United States, very especially by the NAACP and the emerging Harlem Renaissance.<sup>442</sup> Certainly, Shreve's prophecy clearly draws a third argument by admonishing the dangers of miscegenation and the apparent need for segregation to avoid stories like the one he is telling, at the same time that he somehow acknowledges the Southern sin as fateful.<sup>443</sup> Indeed, the legal

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<sup>442</sup> In this study I have not delved too deeply into Faulkner's personal opinions on the racial debates of the times. For a reading of his personal attitudes and their relationship with his work, see especially his own words in William Faulkner, *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters*. Ed. James B. Meriwether. New York: The Modern Library, 2004 [1965]; Frederick Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, eds., *Faulkner in the University*. 1959. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995; James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, eds., *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-1962*. See also the studies of Charles D. Peavy, *Go Slow Now: Faulkner and the Race Question*. Eugene: U of Oregon, 1971; the correspondent chapters in Noel Polk, *Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner*; Theresa M. Towner, *Faulkner on the Color Line*; and Erskine Peters, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha World and Black Being*. See also Christopher C. De Santis' article, "Pseudo-History Versus Social Critique: Faulkner's Reconstruction." *The Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South* 43.1 (Fall 2005): 9-27; Carol Polsgrove, "William Faulkner: No Friend of Brown v. Board of Education." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 32 (Summer 2001): 93-99; Edwin M. Yoder Jr., "Faulkner and Race: Art and Punditry." *The Virginia Quarterly* 73.4 (1997): 565-574. To fathom the complexity of the issue, contrast the former sources to the memories of Faulkner's acquaintance, John B. Cullen, *Old Times in the Faulkner Country*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1961.

<sup>443</sup> Yet many pronouncements in Faulkner's novels are likely to be read as ambivalent. And this final prophecy is read here by Barbara Ladd in the light of Glissant's *créolisation*: "Jim Bond is certainly a sign of the 'creolization' of America—the suggestion of racial mixing in the image of myriad Jim Bonds 'bleach[ing] out' (302) is pretty obvious. Clearly the likelihood of a creole future spells disaster for Quentin. In the light of History's impact in Yoknapatawpha County, however, the survival or regeneration of Jim Bond seems to be more a part of the counternarrative provided by the creole aesthetic that underwrites *Absalom, Absalom!*, more the promise of a future than the threat of one." ("William Faulkner, Edouard Glissant, and a Creole Poetics of History and Body in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *A Fable*." *Faulkner in the Twenty-First Century* 40). John Middleton argues that Shreve's perspective as an outsider provides a more objective point of view on racial relations in the South in his article "Shreve McCannon and Sutpen's Legacy." *The Southern Review* 10 (January 1974): 115-124. For an ironic and revisionist meaning of Shreve's words in comparison to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, see Ben Railton, "What else could a southern gentleman do?: Quentin Compson, Rhett Butler, and miscegenation." *Southern Literary Journal* 35.2 (Spring 2003): 41-63.

prohibitions of interracial marriage in force at the time of the telling of Sutpen's story featured anti-miscegenation as the cornerstone of segregationist policies, since the separation of the races could only be maintained in a biracial society insofar as the color line was clear, as Julie Novkov has conclusively stated in the case of Alabama.<sup>444</sup>

However much Shreve's reading of Sutpen's story reproduces the racist code which fueled the Myth of the South after the Civil War, Shreve's sarcastic and patent reliance on the nostalgic beliefs underpinning old social orders underscores both the tragic sense in which Quentin is trapped, and the perversion of the southern family stories. As the excellent Martinican writer Édouard Glissant wisely sees it

La mixité n'autoriserait que la famille étendue, laquelle ne « comprend » ni la filiation patrilinéaire ni par conséquent la fondation d'une dynastie. Dans l'inextricable du monde, dont témoignent les personnes convoquées par Faulkner dans son œuvre, le malheur et la damnation demeurent les seules résultantes possibles, quand on a repoussé avec révolusion le métissage ou la créolisation.<sup>445</sup>

Consequently, the novel's ambivalent ending accounts for the dramatic and heated debate which made the contradictory internal forces of the Southern myth arise in their most extreme form.

When we attempt to define the narrative functions of the stereotyped arguments mentioned above, we find a clear disclosure of the ultimately central issue of miscegenation, which lies at the heart of the narrative enigma. This evolution is traced through several elements already analyzed, which subsequently direct the reader towards the ultimate consequences of the sinful Southern interracial relations: the presentation of the antebellum South where intermingling adopts the form of images of fusion between races, mainly through the character of Sutpen and from Rosa Coldfield's point of view; the mulatto characters Clytie and the octoroon; the moments of racial contact between Clytie and Rosa Colfield; Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon in his refusal to 'pass'; Mr Compson and mainly Shreve's construction of

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<sup>444</sup> Julie Novkov's study *Racial Union: Law, Intimacy, and the White State in Alabama, 1865-1954* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2008) clearly demonstrates the particular importance of miscegenation in the creation of white supremacy with regards to Alabama, in a book that can be generally applied to most of the states in the South.

<sup>445</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*. Paris: Folio Essais, Gallimard, 1996, 123.

Charles Bon as a mulatto character, and his potential threat of 'passing'; and, finally, the disturbing Jim Bond. All these narrative elements are ordered to gradually intensify the racial tension ensuing from racial contact, revealing the underlying problem of miscegenation as the "umbilical cord" of the narrative. Thus, even though Shreve's construction of a racial version of the Sutpen's family can be seen as a fictional game which does not necessarily match the known information, the issue of miscegenation is a logical culmination of the ordered sequence of allusions to the phenomenon. In its evolution from individuals (the mulatto characters) to interracial mixture as a general problem, the narrative can be seen as a fan that opens the story to a historical dimension provided by the Southern myth, which Shreve utilizes to construct his account. This gradation is narratively shaped by the increasing directness of its references, beginning with images of the mind and ending with a direct laying of blame on miscegenation as the root of the Southern slaveholding society, and by extension as responsible for the disappearance of pure races.

Meanwhile in the broadest terms this seems to be the high point of racial representation in *Absalom, Absalom!*; those aspects already analyzed in particular scenes and characters make Shreve's last prophecy not only more complex, but even questionable in many aspects, thus giving rise to the problems and contradictions Quentin is chained to, and by extension of the Southern society before and after the Civil War.

Amongst those complex issues we find the moments in which racial counterparts seem actually similar, such as Rosa's fusion of the slave and Sutpen, and her first physical contact with Clytie. In those moments racial boundaries seem to disappear in favour of human features. Yet they normally generate feelings and impulses of repulsion, as when Rosa and Henry reject seeing Sutpen fighting with one of his "wild negroes"; or when Miss Rosa knocks Clytie down. And, nonetheless, these clear rejections are counterbalanced by opposite reactions such as Judith and Clytie's patient contemplation of their father in the fighting scene, or Quentin helping Clytie to wake up.

Another complex feature of miscegenation is the widespread circumstance in the South of the crossing of kinship and race

mentioned at the beginning, and envisioned as the nest of racial and family conflict in the South. The major characters here involved are Charles Bon and Clytie in their relationship with their white siblings Henry and Judith, respectively. Undoubtedly beginning as friends, both pairs develop in the opposite direction. In the critical interpretation of the clash between kinship and race, opposite readings emerge. By focusing on Clytie, Davis believes that

her presence, as a mixed-blood person within the Sutpen family, suggests that either race or kinship must be denied if caste and color are to continue to sustain fixed meanings in a changing world. Clytie's involvement in the lives of other characters forwards the conclusion that in order to avoid self-destruction, and perhaps ultimately social disintegration, bonds of kinship on every level must be honored, even if they exist across racial lines (*Faulkner's "Negro"* 211)

Offering a contrast to this reading, Eric Sundquist holds that in the novel racial bonds are prevalent over kinship ones:

In *Absalom, Absalom!* the one crisis [potential incest] holds the other [potential miscegenation] in abeyance for four years and then resolves it, destroying in a further, nearly unnamable act of fratricide the momentary union that has been achieved. . . . One can lay the two crises upon each other only to the extent of recognizing that the retrospective acts of imagination Quentin and Shreve engage in to restore the union between brothers, even to the point of condoning incest, must inevitably lead. . . . to a last crisis in which brothers are, more than ever, not brothers at all; . . . and in which actualities of kinship that miscegenation produced appear more intolerable than ever. (*Faulkner* 121)

Whereas when we regard the evolution of the issue of miscegenation throughout the novel it seems clear that the story is focused on the prevalence of racial factors over family ones, it is true that *Absalom, Absalom!* entertains the conflict between these two factors by juxtaposing different racial stereotypes and common situations of racial relations in the South with family problems. Frederick Douglass' forewarning of the problem of being both a slave and the master's son is here recollected in the characters of Charles Bon and Clytie. Their actions and relationship to their father are presented as contrasting with each other, as the embodiments of the well-known stereotypes of their threatening or loyal character respectively. On the other hand,

they can be taken together in their tragic marginal situation in society, and the family, and are certainly aligned when Shreve attributes blame to them in uttering his moral conclusion. Mulatto characters appear as flat as the formulation of the miscegenation arguments at the end of the novel. They are flat when considered in their codified gestures, their commonplace situations and personal features. However, they look flexible and at times even round, when developed by different narrative voices and shown in their combination of stereotypes. Their fictionalization, indeed, is a major contribution to their status as freestanding personalities, especially when there is invented access to their minds.

Likewise, the issue of miscegenation can be regarded as a flat assumption of the Southern racial code when considering Shreve's last conclusion; yet it looks incredibly complex when contested in the narrative. Shreve effectively prunes these complexities, offering a much more simplified version of the story that, in approaching the potent racist discourse of the times, seems to logically reach a conclusion that clearly invites segregation. Ultimately, the narration cannot completely disown the white perspective that utters it. Nevertheless, the complexities have been shown by the circularity of the stereotypes, and are frozen in Quentin's struggle with his own Southern identity.

Seen from this perspective, the literary representation of miscegenation in *Absalom, Absalom!* clearly endorses racial stereotypes which can be easily identified among the most popular ones, yet their endorsement is challenged in the cohabitation and contraposition of their multiple forms which bring to the narrative the complexity of black and white relations in the South without breaking with the dominant white perspective. In the gradual appearance of allusions and references to race, there is a clear narrative function of foregrounding the racial aspect of the story which complicates the already difficult family structure to the point that the very issue of miscegenation becomes the unknown yet constantly asserted secret that explains the enigma of why Henry killed Bon. A racist yet ambivalently sarcastic prophecy endorses segregation at the same time that it parodies the Southern myth: the image brings to our minds both the House Divided of segregation and the House United of

miscegenation.<sup>446</sup> However, Shreve's nightmare of miscegenation presents a vivid contrast to the more complex situations in the previous narratives, thus producing a similar effect on Quentin in forcing him to go back to the shell of the Myth, like that which Marlow finds in the conventional heroic account of the Adventure novel and travel writing.

## 5. 5. Images of whiteness: a focus on the Anglo-Saxon gentleman and the poor whites

An important contrast when comparing *Lord Jim* and Conrad's work in general to *Absalom, Absalom!*, and most of Faulkner's work, is found in the expression of whiteness.<sup>447</sup> While in the former novel whiteness is the central, overtly analyzed and asserted value (yet submitted to revision), in the latter, what we may call "white pride" is not apparent. There is no mistake about the white perspective in the narrative and the racial consciousness at the end, as well as the conviction that white is racially superior to black. However, in *Absalom, Absalom!* we would not find an explicit or direct expression of the pleasant "distinction of being white." Yet, as we have seen in the introduction, Towner demonstrates in her analysis of Faulkner's later novels—very much in accordance with Bhabha's perspective of the functioning of the colonial discourse—that the construction of whiteness is the fundamental shift in our reflections on racial discourse and racial representation in literature. Whether by paying attention to the descriptions of whiteness, or the description of its counterpart "other," they necessarily demand to be seen in correspondence. In *Absalom, Absalom!* whiteness is addressed critically when specifically

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<sup>446</sup> I have not devoted too much attention to Faulkner's personal ideas on segregation, in spite of the heated debate over them, which appears in the aforementioned biographical and ideological studies. However, for a specific discussion on the issue of integration versus segregation in relation to his fiction and with the fundamental point of view of well-known African American writers such as Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, see Grace Elizabeth Hale and Robert Jackson, "We're Trying Hard as Hell to Free Ourselves": Southern History and Race in the Making of William Faulkner's Literary Terrain." *A Companion to William Faulkner*. Ed. Richard C. Moreland. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. 28-45.

<sup>447</sup> Theresa M. Towner has written a very singular essay on whiteness in Faulkner's short stories worth of reading to understand Faulkner's deep concern with seeing the complexities of such a "magical" word: "Being Against Snow." *Mississippi Quarterly* 60.3 (Summer 2007): 461-479.

referring to the Anglo-Saxon gentleman—in clear instance of intertextuality with *Lord Jim*<sup>448</sup>—and in the representation of those dismissingly referred to as “White Trash.”<sup>449</sup> It mainly functions to introduce nuances in the racial divisions and the institution of slavery. The white racial perspective dependant on the Southern and the biological racial discourses is apparent in a negative sense, more from the assumption of racial stereotypes depicting African Americans than from direct assertion of white pride. Thus, Bahaba’s mechanism of the fetish is more effective here than in *Lord Jim*, where counterparts are more explicit.

Hence, there are two main focal points, which either make reference to or represent whiteness directly. On the one hand, we find an allusion to the Anglo-Saxon gentleman that Mr Compson attributes to Charles Bon’s perspective of Henry Sutpen when the former might have shown his white brother his mistress and his mulatto child. Mr Compson speculates how Bon tried to persuade Henry on the basis of his not pertaining to the Anglo-Saxon culture and race:

Until Henry would speak, ‘But a bought woman. A whore’: and Bon, even gently now, ‘Not a whore. Dont say that. In fact, never refer to one of them by that name in New Orleans: otherwise you may be forced to purchase that privilege with some of your blood from probably a thousand men’, and perhaps still gently, perhaps now even with something of pity: that pessimistic and sardonic cerebral pity of the intelligent for any human injustice or folly or suffering: ‘Not whores. And not whore because of us, the thousand. We—the thousand, the white men—made them, created and produced them; we even made the laws which declare that one eighth of a specified kind of blood shall outweigh even eighths of another kind. I admit that. But that same white race would have made them slaves too, laborers, cooks, maybe even field hands, if it were not for this thousand, these few men like myself without principles or honor either, perhaps you will say. We cannot, perhaps we do not even want to, save all of them; perhaps the thousand we save are not one in a thousand. But we save that one. . . . Though He [God] must have

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<sup>448</sup> For further information about intertextuality see Michel Gresset and Noel Polk, eds., *Intertextuality in Faulkner*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1985.

<sup>449</sup> I want to make clear here that when I use this expression it is in a historical sense, as it was employed by upper class whites to refer to poor whites which are codified as much as other groups. I understand this category is highly derogatory, however the expression tells much about the classist and disdainful framework of its contemporary users.

been young once, surely He was young once, and surely someone who has existed as long as He has, who has looked at as much crude and promiscuous sinning without grace or restraint or decorum as He has had to, to contemplate at last, even though the instances are not in a thousand thousand, the principles of honor, decorum and gentleness applied to perfectly normal human instinct which you Anglo-Saxons insist upon calling lust and in whose service you revert in sabbaticals to the primordial caverns, the fall from what you call grace fogged and clouded by Heaven-defying words of extenuation and explanation, the return to grace heralded by Heaven-placating cries of satiated abasement and flagellation, in neither of which—the defiance or the placation—can Heaven find interest or even, after the first two or three times, diversion. (96)

This is intended as a critique of the sexual exploitation of female slaves in the “Anglo-Saxon” South in contrast to the less brutal manner of consorting with mistresses in New Orleans.<sup>450</sup> The criticism is explicit and on a first reading it should be taken as such. Nonetheless, Faulkner’s narrative talent manages to overshadow the critique here as well, using three narrative strategies: first, Mr Compson’s imagination that these are Bon’s words places the criticism in question; secondly, Bon might have uttered these words with the not fully trustworthy intention of persuading Henry to accept his mistress’ family; and third, the narrative’s final revelation that Bon is black interrogates his legitimate criticism of white men, because he does not in fact belong to the white race that enslaves, but rather to the subjected race. Again, the racial statements appear ambivalent.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> See Mencken’s chapter “An American Anomaly” for the details of these common mistress families. It is interesting also to note here that underlying Bon’s critique of the Anglo-Saxons’ behavior, James A. Snead finds another relevant contradiction in the Southern culture: “In short, the twin sexual taboos of the white southern male—against racial mixing, and against premarital sexual relations for the white woman—have become, in the face of *eros*, mutually exclusive. The ‘debt’ that the virgin caste owes to black women despoiled also creates a residue of guilt in which the seeming polarities of white virgin and slave concubine inextricably commingle” (“The ‘Joint’ of Racism: Withholding the Black in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, 131.) See also Reuter’s descriptions of concubinage and his references to Frederick Law Olmsted’s antebellum classic account *The Cotton King* regarding the particular situation in New Orleans (139).

<sup>451</sup> Myra Jehlen points out this ambivalence in commenting on the novel’s attitude towards the Southern gentleman: “The real threat to Sutpen’s happiness and morality . . . lies in the plantation system itself. To survive as a man he has to become a gentleman; but to become a gentleman, he must sacrifice his ethical

On the other hand, whiteness is focused by means of the likewise degrading image of the poor whites, which was not alien to the contemporary *meillieur* that engendered novels such as Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* (1932), and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and which would later become the focus of Faulkner's Snopes' Trilogy.<sup>452</sup> Poor whites are represented in the incident that occurred on the Virginia Plantation, which introduces Thomas Sutpen's social, economic, and geographical origins, and in the character of Wash Jones.<sup>453</sup> Both function to emphasize class relations in contrast to race relations and, in fact, contribute to the estab-

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manhood. His rise and fall, spanning the years of established plantation hegemony, thus sketches a radically critical picture of the antebellum South. . . . But Thomas Sutpen as planter can also express an opposite attitude of sympathy for the aristocracy like that evident in *Sartoris*. Whereas there, however, Faulkner's sympathy blocked his exploration of the concrete realities of plantation life, here it results rather in a more complex perception of the plight of the gentleman." (*Class and Character in Faulkner's South*. New York: Columbia UP, 1976, 64-65.)

<sup>452</sup> W. J. Cash already warned about the codification of a wide and varied group of people, and about the features attributed to them, as well as the different ways they were contemptuously labeled. His should be considered a documentary source, yet also an internal contemporary Southern account: "Thousands and ten thousands—possibly the majority—of non-slaveholders were really yeoman farmers. Some of these occupied the poorer cotton lands; but by far the greater number of them were planted on lands which, while they were reckoned as of no account for cotton, were fertile enough for other purposes. Nearly all of them enjoyed some measure of the kind of curious half-thrifty, half-shiftless prosperity—a thing of sagging rail fences, unpainted houses, and crazy barns which yet bulged with corn. And if they are to be called poor whites, then it is not at all in the ordinary connotation of the term, but only in a relative and broad sense—only as their estate is compared with that of the larger planters, and, what is more important, only as they may be thought of as being exploited, in an indirect and limited fashion, by the plantation system. . . . The poor whites in the strict sense were merely the weakest elements of the old backcountry population, in whom these effects of the plantation had worked themselves out to the ultimate term; . . . They were the people to whom the term 'cracker' properly applied—the 'white-trash' and 'po'buckra' of the house-niggers, within the narrowest meaning of those epithets, which, however, were very far from being always used with nice discrimination." (*The Mind of the South*. 1941. New York: Vintage Books, 1991, 22-23.)

<sup>453</sup> The social origins and future design of Sutpen encouraged David Minter to consider Faulkner's peculiar ambivalence in "The Strange, Double-Edged Gift of Faulkner's Fiction" *Faulkner at 100: Retrospect and Prospect*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1997. Ed. Donald Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1997. 140-153; see also by this author, on the relationship between the changing family and the hearing and talking of the region to the articulation of identity in "Family, Region, and Myth in Faulkner's fiction." *Faulkner and the Southern Renaissance*. Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1981. Ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1982. 182-203.

lishment of a new social hierarchy that relaxes racial boundaries in times of slavery.<sup>454</sup> Indeed, not all whites have access to the same privileges, and distinctions between them serve the narrative to build Thomas Sutpen's trajectory towards a position of power held by the Anglo-Saxon Southern gentleman, which is revealed, as Godden has argued, in the primal scene of the white planter's refusal to allow poor whites to enter the front door.<sup>455</sup>

When Quentin narrates what Grandfather told him, and that Sutpen had in turn told him about Sutpen's growing up when his family came down from the mountains to the Virginian plantation, he reports the antagonism between poor whites and slaves, which was based on the fact that "other whites like them . . . lived in other cabins not quite as well built and not at all as well kept and preserved as the ones the nigger slaves lived in but still nimbused with freedom's bright aura, which the slave quarters were not for all their sound roofs and white wash" (189).

As Sutpen is reported to have said, in them there was

a certain flat level silent way his older sisters and the other white women of their kind had of looking at niggers, not with fear or dread but with a kind of speculative antagonism not because of any known fact or reason but inherited by both white and black, the sense, effluvium of it passing between the white women in the doors of the sagging cabins and the niggers in the road and which was not quite explainable by the fact that the niggers had better clothes, and which the niggers did not return as antagonism or in any sense of dare or taunt but through the very fact that they were apparently oblivious of it, too oblivious of it (you knew that you could hit them, he told Grandfather, and they would not hit back or even resist. But you did not want to, because they (the niggers) were not it, not what you wanted to hit (190)

The class antagonism and rage is directed mainly towards the white planter, but there is a group of people in the middle without freedom yet somehow paternalistically protected by their master: the slaves.

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<sup>454</sup> Significantly, Faulkner will develop his analysis of poor whites in his later fiction, especially the Snopes' trilogy, *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957), and *The Mansion* (1959).

<sup>455</sup> Richard Godden's detailed interpretation emphasizes this trajectory focusing on the labor relations rather than the racial ones in *Fictions of Labor*.

The argument that slaves were treated better than the poor whites has a long tradition, in the South as well as the North, mainly argued using the example of the workers in the newly industrialized regions, in contrast to the situation of the “cared for” slaves in the “paternalist” plantation economic system.<sup>456</sup> This worked as a proslavery argument. The use of this contrast in this novel shall further illuminate its functions. Class antagonism between the two lower groups in the social hierarchy is evident in a collateral incident of Sutpen’s childhood, in which the poor whites’ resentment results in the lynching of one of the planter’s slaves.<sup>457</sup> Sutpen remembers how

one night late when his father came home, blundered into the cabin; he could smell whiskey even while still dulled with broken sleep, hearing that same fierce exultation, vindication, in his father’s voice: ‘We whipped one of Pettibon’s niggers tonight’ and he roused at that, wake at that, asking which one of Pettibone’s niggers and his father said he did not know, had never seen the nigger before. . . . how, without knowing it then since he had not yet discovered innocence, he must have meant the question the same way his father meant the answer: no actual nigger, living creature, living flesh to feel pain and writhe and cry out. (191)

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<sup>456</sup> Peter Kolchin, for example, recalls that “this comparison invariably concluded that slavery produced a humane, orderly, and conservative social order, one far superior to that based on the dangerous experiment in free labor under way in the North and in England, an experiment that inevitably led to class warfare, social disintegration, radicalism, a spirit of selfish individualism, and a reckless enthusiasm for one new faddish idea after another” (194). See also the example Cobb mentions of this argument, 46. The paradoxes between North and South are filtered in the novel, as David Levin suggests, in Bon’s letter, written “on the finest French stationery (the best of the Old South), but he has to write with stove polish (the best of the New North)” (“*Absalom, Absalom!*: The Problem of Re-creating History.” *In Defense of Historical Literature: Essays on American History, Autobiography, Drama, and Fiction*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967, 125.)

<sup>457</sup> In commenting Faulkner’s depiction of the conflict between poor whites and blacks, Kevin Railey observes that “one of the acts they [poor whites living in plantations] commit without consequence, in fact, was beating up slaves. . . . Self-defense on the part of slaves was forbidden by Virginia legal statute” (“*Absalom, Absalom!* and the Southern Ideology of Race.” *The Faulkner Journal* 13.1/2, Fall 1997/Spring 1998: 45). In regards to lynching, Faulkner made these vile acts central in novels such as *Light in August* or *Go Down, Moses* and short stories such as “Dry September” out of his own historical context. See an interesting essay on these correspondences in Martha Banta, “The Razor, the Pistol, and the Ideology of Race Etiquette.” *Faulkner and Ideology* 172-216.

While non-rebel slaves are the victims of Sutpen's father's contempt, the stereotype of the poor white will eventually attain the destruction of the real object of his rage, the white planter. In this sense, the episode of Virginia both accounts for a new social hierarchy in which the derogatively called "white trash" actually enjoy a lower social and economic status than slaves; and for the narrative development of the story towards the poor whites' revenge for their extortion, by foreshadowing Wash Jones' subsequent killing of Sutpen, when the latter had treated his daughter Milly and his granddaughter worse than a mare. As Myra Jehlen notes here, "the wheel, driven round by the imbalances in its own construction, has come full circle with the vengeance of a redneck on a gentleman who trampled his dignity. Sutpen is killed by a man who might have been himself" (67). Accordingly, it is not only slaves and mulattoes who rebel against the plantation system, but also poor whites who are mistreated by Southern planters. Indeed, as John N. Duvall underlines,

When he emerges from his cave, Sutpen is reborn into a strange, newly raced world. Still visibly "white" (after all, his skin color has not changed), he is simultaneously not-white because he no longer enjoys the primary marker of whiteness, which is an experience of the self as unmarked by race. If his is in a sense Sutpen's primal scene, it is also the primal scene of the southern political imaginary: the reification of class as race. The boy now feels himself to be a member of a race apart (one that is subhuman, passing its deserved poverty genetically to its offspring) and, in that regard, difficult to distinguish from the black slave. Both the poor white and the African American are denied humanity by southern Whiteness; . . . As a result of this self-consciousness of himself as a member of an oppressed and displaced race, his subsequent southern Whiteness is always a performance.<sup>458</sup>

Thus, to make things more ambiguous, in this novel the rebellion is actually directed against what is in *Absalom, Absalom!* played to be a Sutpen that John Matthews refers to as "something of a fool, a buffoonist" never to be confused with a real Southern aristocrat, due to Sutpen's class origins, which are reflected in all his actions, "in his climb to becoming the county's biggest plantation master."<sup>459</sup> Indeed, we can see class and racial lines as both mutually antagonistic and as

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<sup>458</sup> John N. Duvall, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction: From Faulkner to Morrison*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, 10.

<sup>459</sup> John T. Matthews, *William Faulkner: Seeing Through the South*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 194.

overlapping, when we observe the problematic whiteness of both the Southern white planter and the poor white in relation to the slave. Different lines of rebellion, thus, run parallel in the story, yet with an emphasis on the conflicts and flawed patterns of behaviour of poor whites in relation to a fading real Anglo-Saxon Southern aristocracy.<sup>460</sup>

Class distinctions are embodied in the way Wash Jones is represented. Not only does his very name already suggest a contraction of “White Trash,” but his entire character is fixed according to that perspective of him. Violence and contempt shape the narrative of Wash Jones, not only in his poverty and mistreatment but also in the way the narrators make him speak. His words—which are at least reported, unlike of those of African American slaves, which are silenced—reproduce oral speech to show him as uneducated and not very intelligent, and he is repeatedly referred to by Miss Rosa as a “brute.”<sup>461</sup>

Wash Jones lives in “an abandoned and rotting fish camp in the river bottom . . . where he now permitted Wash and his daughter and infant granddaughter to live, performing the heavy garden work and supplying Ellen, and Judith and then Judith with fish and game now and then” (103). It is not until the Civil War disrupts class and race relations that he can even enter “the house now who until Sutpen went away had never approached nearer than the scuppernong arbour behind the kitchen where on Sunday afternoons he and Sutpen would drink from the demijohn and the bucket of spring water which Wash fetched from almost a mile away” (103). Sutpen treats him in a patronizing way, sharing with him some pleasures and allowing him to remain in his company, yet he makes him act almost as a slave in his relationship with his family, and in relation to his work duties. Wash Jones’ always-subservient tone of address to Sutpen comes to an end when Sutpen leaves Wash’s daughter Milly pregnant, and treats her as his slave. After the Civil War, and having previously been loyal to Sutpen, Wash Jones finally kills him in the ultimate breach of the class structures underpinning the plantation system, and already performed by Sutpen’s slaves running away at the start of the conflict. Wash’s

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<sup>460</sup> Consider here another discussed conflict in the idea of the gentleman: that a black person dared to be a gentleman, which appears in *The Rivers* and is lucidly analyzed in Towner’s *Faulkner* 38-47.

<sup>461</sup> Rosa’s intense contempt for him is shown, for example, when he drives her to Sutpen’s Hundred right after Henry has killed Bon. Wash says “‘Hit was right younder.’ — ‘What was right there, fool?’ I cried, and he: ‘Hit was’ until I took the whip from bim into my own hand and struck the mule” (112).

threatening words: “*I’m going to tech you, Kernel*” (154) enact this break in recalling that repulsive gesture that white supremacists understand as the eventual collapse of social inequality.

The Civil War is coincident with the downfall of Sutpen’s Hundred, which is also reflected in the downfall of social and racial hierarchies, since the shop opened by Judith and Sutpen had “a clientele of freed niggers and (what is it? the word? white what? – Yes, trash) with Jones for clerk” (150). Insofar as Shreve is unfamiliar with the context of the poor whites in the South, he cannot activate this class division in his reading of Sutpen’s story, yet it appears in most of the Southern narrators’ accounts, and mainly Quentin’s. Again, the story evolves towards a simplification in Shreve’s choosing of elements of the myth, which leads to a superficial reading of Sutpen’s downfall.

Through these episodes and characters, *Absalom, Absalom!* introduces a new hierarchy in which class divisions appear as important as racial ones at many points in the narrative. Indeed, class is one of the most relevant issues in the novel, yet unfortunately its analysis is beyond the reach of this study.<sup>462</sup> However, what is of interest here is the extent to which class issues modify race representation. The main function of the representation of the poor whites is to introduce a new social hierarchical perspective which includes not only the racial division between white masters, mulattoes, and African American slaves in a correspondent pyramid, but also the poor whites even if they are on the same level as the latter. The “White Trash” are the poorest of all, but they have freedom; meanwhile, the slaves can be beaten without the right to fight back, but the masters’ self-interest dictates that they are protected from hunger and want, at least in the Upper South. While this portrait is in fact in accordance with the proslavery discourse that lasted throughout Jim Crow to preserve the Southern Myth, as it is shown in Faulkner’s public statements; on the other hand, in a certain way it is historically accurate since the Civil War would alter not only the racial hierarchy but also the class hierarchy. This is represented by Clytie’s treatment of Wash Jones, even once the

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<sup>462</sup> Regarding class relations, specifically on the social and economic ideals of the “southern gentleman” and the yeoman in the South, see: Ritchie Devon Watson, Jr., *Yeoman versus Cavalier: The Old South Southwest’s Fictional Road to Rebellion*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1993. For studies relating Faulkner to class issues, see Myra Jehlen *Class and Character* and Duane Carr, *A Question of class: The Redneck Stereotype in Southern Fiction*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State UP, 1996.

slaves have fled: she still tries to prevent him from crossing the kitchen threshold. As James Snead observes

Sutpen rouses in Rosa and Wash the vain hope that they are not in the same circle as the “niggers” whose social elevation the community has permanently barred. Yet Thomas Sutpen violently excludes both Rosa and Wash, each in a cruel way. In all respects, the novel affirms that the “nigger” is just an exaggerated and special case of the way whites treat each other: as long as there are any “niggers,” whites run the risk of being treated like them.<sup>463</sup>

The story of Wash Jones thus contributes to mitigating racial divisions, which allows us to see that racial attitudes clearly have economic and social motives, as Faulkner argued himself.<sup>464</sup> Notwithstanding, this weakening of the racial divisions has a paradoxical effect on the representation of African Americans, since, as Weinstein argues, “produced to satisfy the needs of a plantation culture, this network privileges blacks over poor whites. It finds menial jobs for blacks, clothes and feeds them, uses them to maintain its own function and image. Within such an emergent paradigm (privileged by its placement in the text as an overwhelming epiphany), black suffering under the plantation system becomes marginal. The victim we are invited to internalize here is the lower-class white” (*Faulkner’s Subject* 54).

With respect to narrative functions, thus, both the Anglo-Saxon critique and the poor whites work to accentuate the class divisions in the novel, which especially affect Sutpen’s failure. Both help to notice that which Miss Rosa utters at the very beginning of the story—and in a clear intertextual link with *Lord Jim*—as one of the main flaws of Sutpen’s design: “He wasn’t a gentleman. He wasn’t even a

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<sup>463</sup> James A. Snead, *Figures of Division*. New York: Methuen, 1986, 110.

<sup>464</sup> In his essay “On Fear: Deep South in Labor: Mississippi,” Faulkner writes: “Nor is the tragedy the fear so much as the tawdry quality of the fear—fear not of the Negro as an individual Negro nor even as a race, but as an economic class or stratum or factor, since what the Negro threatens is not the Southern white man’s social system but the Southern white man’s economic system. . . . That’s what the white man in the South is afraid of: that the Negro, who has done so much with no chance, might do so much more with an equal one that he might take the white man’s economy away from him, the Negro now the banker or the merchant or the planter and the white man the share-cropper or the tenant” (William Faulkner, *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters* 95).

gentleman” (11). The familiar origin, thus, seems to confirm the strict social hierarchy on the slaveholding South.

In addition to this, poor whites work not only to blur the sharp racial divisions analyzed above, contributing to the aim of defining the complexity of the Southern world, but they simultaneously participate of the proslavery discourse to which class divisions were much more important than racial ones, and which argued for the significance of the fact that slaves were guaranteed protection and economic aid, which racist whites claimed made the latter feel rather comfortable in the Southern “peculiar institution.”

## 5. 6. The Shadows of the Haitian Revolution

The contrasting shadow to the South’s “peculiar institution” appears with Sutpen’s previous social ascendance in Haiti. As Sundquist remarks, “when Faulkner turned from *Light in August* to *Absalom, Absalom!*, a new exploration of the race nightmare, he chose a tale steeped in antebellum history and, like *Benito Cereno*, anchored through Sutpen’s so-called mistake in the revolt of Haitian slaves that became the central emblem of insurrectionary terror in the slaveholding South” (“Faulkner, Race 26). This “racial nightmare” was engendered by the only victorious slave revolution, which occurred in the West Indies, specifically in Haiti, in 1791.<sup>465</sup> The ensuing terror fueled the stereotype of the savage, rebellious and threatening slave, as well as that of his mixed-blood brother, the Creole.<sup>466</sup> The myth of Haiti retained its potency throughout nineteenth century, and endured well

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<sup>465</sup> See especially, Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti’s influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1988.

<sup>466</sup> Of course, seen from the point of view of the rest of the Caribbean, the Haitian Revolution worked as a model of slave insurrection that secured the country’s independence, as it is well-explained in Susan Gillman’s “The Epistemology of Slave Conspiracy.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 49.1 (Spring 2003): 101-123. See also the very interesting collection of essays edited by David P. Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2001. For a brief and clear understanding of the paradoxical effects of this event, see especially Robin Blackburn’s article “The Force of Example” 15-20. For a varied collection of articles about the relationship between Caribbean Créoles and the American South, see Jessica Adams, Michael P. Bibler, and Cécile Accilien, eds., *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the US South*. Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2007.

into the twentieth. The “passing” novel *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900) by Charles W. Chesnutt is only one example of the power of the myth of Haiti, and furthermore of its relationship with the threat of miscegenation. In a remarkable passage, the white southerner Tryon reads the following in a medical journal:

Turning the leaves idly, he came upon an article by a Southern writer, upon the perennial race problem that has vexed the country for a century. The writer maintained that owing to a special tendency of the negro blood, however diluted, to revert to the African type, any future amalgamation of the white and black races, which foolish and wicked Northern negrophiles predicted as the ultimate result of the new conditions confronting the South, would therefore be an ethnological impossibility; for the smallest trace of negro blood would inevitably drag down the superior race to the level of the inferior, and reduce the fair Southland, already devastated by the hand of the invader, to the frightful level of Hayti, the awful example of negro incapacity. To forefend their beloved land, now doubly sanctified by the blood of her devoted sons who had fallen in the struggle to maintain her liberties and preserve her property, it behooved every true Southron to stand firm against the abhorrent tide of radicalism, to maintain the supremacy and purity of his all-pervading, all-conquering race, and to resist by every available means the threatened domination of an inferior and degraded people, who were set to rule hereditary freemen ere they had themselves scarce ceased to be slaves.<sup>467</sup>

Barbara Ladd reminds us of the historical background of this fear when she explains that

At one point during Thomas Jefferson’s reelection campaign in 1800, a U.S. representative from South Carolina wrote home that the antislavery French were about to launch an invasion of the southern states from bases in Santo Domingo—and indication that the creole threat was not solely based on the specter of black revolution. For a time, terrified of the consequences on their own slaves of contact with refugees from the black and mulatto revolutions of the West Indies, Americans prohibited immigration into ports of Charleston and New Orleans. Not only were black Creoles feared but white ones as well, for they carried servants with them. Even if servants were prohibited from entering the ports, these white refugees would talk of what they had experienced. It was sometimes the fear of the effects of rumor, of

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<sup>467</sup> Charles W. Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars*. Ed. Judith Jackson Fossett. New York: The Modern Library, 2003, 74.

talk, that made Americans distrust even white Creoles. They, too, carried “news” that might threaten the supposed peace of the U.S. slave states. (*Nationalism and the Color Line* 25)

Indeed, the main narrative function of Haiti in the novel can be narrowed down to increasing the tension which accompanies the surfacing of racial conflict as the heart of the enigma of the story. This stereotype has already been activated by Sutpen’s “wild negroes,” and by the interracial encounters either depicted or alluded to. Although this is an unmistakable effect conveyed by the codified terror of Haiti in the racial imagery of the times, Faulkner manages to turn this codified—historical yet symbolic—reference into a much more complex narrative constituent. Ambivalence is elaborated here in a very sophisticated manner.

Haiti comes out in the story as the place where Sutpen learns at school that “there was a place called the West Indies to which poor men went in ships and became rich, it didn’t matter how, so long as that man was clever and courageous” (200). Quentin narrates that story from Grandfather’s version of it, since Sutpen himself told it to him by the campfire while waiting for the slaves to catch the runaway Martinican “architect,” in a fictional parody of the Haitian Revolution. Sutpen goes to the West Indies in 1823 when he is fourteen and spends six years there, until a “nigger” revolt breaks out on the French plantation where he was working as an overseer, which he manages to put down heroically. The atmosphere of this supposed slave revolt—described in both gothic and heroic terms—creates an extreme tension that reflects the “racial nightmare” and, simultaneously, validates the white man’s “courage” and supremacy. This is how Grandfather reports Sutpen’s words, in the moments after “the niggers rushed at him with their machetes” (206):

then the house, the barricade, the five of them—the planter, the daughter, two women servants and himself—shut up in it and the air filled with the smoke and smell of burning cane and the glare and smoke of it on the sky and the air throbbing and trembling with the drums and the chanting—the little lost island beneath its down-cupped bowl of alternating day and night like a vacuum into which no help could come, where not even winds from the outer world came but only the trades, the same weary winds blowing back and forth across it and burdened still with the weary voices of murdered women and children homeless and graveless about the isolating and solitary sea—while the two servants and the girl whose Christian name he did

not yet know loaded the muskets which he and the father fired at no enemy but the Haitian night itself, lancing their little vain and puny flashed into the brooding and blood-weary and throbbing darkness: and in the very time of year, the season between hurricanes and any hope of rain: and how on the eight night the water gave out and something had to be done so he put the musket down and went out and subdued them. That was how he told it: he went out and subdued them, and when he returned the girl became engaged to marry (210)

The terror activated by the island of Haiti is evoked by Grandfather's reflections to Quentin. These work to mirror the fated degradation and corruption of the Caribbean world in contrast to what had once seemed the most stable future of the South, which had supposedly established a peaceful slaveholding society, immortalized later by the Myth of the Old South. Ashli White explains how the white refugees from Saint-Domingue during the Haitian Revolution depicted themselves as victims, and the slaves as "cannibals," "unchained tigers," "savages," and "monsters," to counter the criticism emanating from the American Republic of their incapacity to put down the revolt. After a polemical confrontation over the U.S. response to the independence of Haiti between Federalists and Jeffersonians, the latter, "worried about how this sympathy might undermine institutionalized racism and slavery in the United States," in the aftermath of Haitian independence, "borrowed heavily from the rhetoric of the refugees, especially its characterization of black and colored soldiers as 'brutal' and 'dishonored.' Throughout the antebellum era, the refugee's spin on the revolution turned up repeatedly as proslavery advocates alluded to the violence and 'treachery' of the Haitian Revolution (and the victimization of white male inhabitants) in their arguments against abolition. Here, again, white Americans looked to the Haitian Revolution to justify their nation's distinctiveness."<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Ashli White, "The Saint-Dominguan Refugees and American Distinctiveness in the Early Years of the Haitian Revolution," *The World of the Haitian Revolution*. Ed. David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2009, 257. Also of interest for our concerns are the chapters in this book, "Free Upon Higher Ground?: Saint-Domingue Slaves' Suits for Freedom in the US Courts, 1792-1830" by Sue Peabody (261-283) and "The Specter of Saint-Domingue: American and French Reactions to the Haitian Revolution" by Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall (317-338).

Along with this view, Sutpen's story suggests to Grandfather the thoughts of

a theatre for violence and injustice and bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty, for the last despairing fury of all the pariah-interdict and all the doomed—a little island set in a smiling and fury-lurked and incredible indigo sea, which was the halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization, halfway between the dark inscrutable continent from which the black blood, the black bones and flesh and thinking and remembering and hopes and desired, was ravished by violence, and the cold known land to which it was doomed, the civilised land and people to which had expelled some of its own blood and thinking and desires that had become too crass to be faced and borne longer, and set it homeless and desperate on the lonely ocean—a little lost island in a latitude which would require ten thousand years of equatorial heritage to bear its climate, a soil manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation until it sprang with an incredible paradox of peaceful greenery and crimson flowers and sugar cane sapling size and three times the height of a man and a little bulkier of course but valuable pound for pound almost with silver ore, as if nature held a balance and kept a book and offered a recompense for the torn limbs and outraged hearts even if man did not, the planting of nature and man too watered not only by the wasted blood but breathed over by the winds in which the doomed ships had fled in vain, out of which the last tatter of sail had sunk into the blue sea, along which the last vain despairing cry of woman or child had blown away; —the planting of men too: the yet intact bones and brains in which the old unsleeping blood that had vanished into the earth they trod still cried out of vengeance. (207)

Many interpretations originate from the violence and brutality of this slave world in the West Indies. Richard Godden intelligently pointed out the discordance between historical times and the times of the story to introduce the idea that Faulkner is, in fact, rewriting the History of Haiti and the South of the United States, or what Deborah Cohn names “the Two Souths.”<sup>469</sup> Godden notes that when Sutpen arrives in Haiti, in 1823, there had not been slavery for already three decades—since the revolution of 1791. There were no planters and no slaves to be put down. From his point of view, Faulkner manipulates the history of the island by superposing onto its situation in the

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<sup>469</sup> Deborah N. Cohn, *History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction*. Nashville and London: Vanderbilt UP, 1999.

previous century the contemporary colonizing reality of the United States. Whereas previous authors had attributed the perceived anachronism to a mistake, Godden analyses Faulkner's knowledge about, and the importance of Haiti in the history of the United States, in order to argue that "Faulkner's chronology creates an anachronism that rewrites one of the key facts of nineteenth-century black American history, in what looks suspiciously like an act of literary counterrevolution."<sup>470</sup>

Maritza Stanchich, on the other hand, considers the effects of the introduction of the Haitian episode in the story of the slaveholding South:

By using Haiti and a mixed-race Haitian Creole that can "pass" for white as the fulcrum of the story, Faulkner extends the curse of Southern slavery outside the South, encompassing the entire American agenda in and out of its borders. The Caribbean is the source not only of Sutpen's lineage but of the Southern plantation system as well, and both are challenged simultaneously.<sup>471</sup>

Hence, slavery is not a problem confined to the South but related to U.S. imperialism in general, for "Faulkner's portrayal of Haiti, as opposed to Sutpen's, solidly links the curse of Southern slavery with the curse of American imperialism" (614). Faulkner fuses the context of the decades prior to the novel's publication, when the United States extended its imperialist reach to control Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Haiti in the Caribbean, with the North American expeditions to the West Indies in pursuit of a fortune.<sup>472</sup> In unfolding this argument, Elizabeth Steeby draws the figure of Charles Bon as the linking character that heightens both the distinctions between the Haitian and the U.S. South worlds, and enacts the problems of their intimate historical bonds, by posing the dilemma of Haiti as part of the U.S. in the moment of its occupation, at the same time that Charles Bon's kinship with the Sutpens highlights the problem of the "outsider subaltern who, by virtue of Sutpen's

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<sup>470</sup> Richard Godden, "Absalom, Absalom! Haiti, and Labor History: Reading Unreadable Revolutions." *ELH* 61.3 (Autumn 1994): 685. Later incorporated in *Fictions of Labor*.

<sup>471</sup> Maritza Stanchich, "The Hidden Caribbean 'Other' in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*: An Ideological Ancestry of U. S. Imperialism." *Mississippi Quarterly* 49.3 (Summer 1996): 604.

<sup>472</sup> More precisely, the occupation by the United States in the period 1915-1934.

‘occupation’ of a Haitian plantation, has been violently *ingested* but not wholly *included* in the larger U.S. American family.”<sup>473</sup> Thus Bon develops from a “national outsider” to a “racial outsider.”

In a revision of the idea that Faulkner sets the Haitian Revolution as a context for the novel, John Matthews suggests that Sutpen’s Haiti might accurately refer to the revolts of the subdued Haitians during the first decades of the nineteenth century on the island, following the imposition of the Rural Code against the mulatto sons of the former French colonizers. Here Quentin and his Grandfather would overlook the colonial context as much as Sutpen did.<sup>474</sup> This convincing interpretation, however, should not lead us to dismiss the power of the Haitian myth that was sustained throughout the nineteenth century, and its use in the slaveholding and the postbellum South to justify certain black stereotypes that would augment the exclusion of African Americans from the privileges of white society.

Regardless of whether we go so far in our reading of the overlapping historical contexts, and in deciding for or against historical accuracy versus anachronism, what seems clear is that the issue of slavery is again presented in the novel through the “nigger revolt,” which in Haiti and the West Indies in general works as a reminder of the consequences of the original Haitian slave revolt. This presentation of slavery certainly implies harsher conditions than those of the paternalistic point of view of the peculiar institution in the Old South, as Seam Latham notes. Thus, this reinforces the framework of the dichotomist proslavery discourse that is somehow endorsed by the Myth of the Old South.<sup>475</sup>

Furthermore, the presence of Haiti and the subsequent revelation that Sutpen’s first wife was part “Negro” recalls the difference in status of the mulattos in the slaveholding societies of the French Antilles. Not only did they equal the number of whites on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, but in Saint Domingue, as Doris Garraway explains, “the free people of color made a strong impact on the island’s economy.

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<sup>473</sup> Elizabeth Steeby, “Almost Feminine, Almost Brother, Almost Southern: The Transnational Queer Figure of Charles Bon in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Global Faulkner* 153.

<sup>474</sup> John T. Matthews, “Recalling the West Indies: From Yoknapatawpha to Haiti and Back.” *American Literary History* 16.2 (2004): 238-262.

<sup>475</sup> Sean Latham argues that Haiti also evinces that slavery in fact originated in European imperialism. See “Jim Bond’s America: Denaturalizing the Logic of Slavery in *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Mississippi Quarterly* 51.3 (Summer 1998): 453-463.

Having acquired and inherited property as a result of their own labors or from white benefactors, many free coloreds were successful sugar planters, and in particular, they dominated the cultivation of coffee and indigo, crops whose production soared after 1760.<sup>476</sup> Therefore, the proleptic function of Haiti does not only affect the role of Sutpen's slaves in the novel, but it suggests the menace enacted by Charles Bon, by highlighting the prospect of changing roles and rights of access to the plantation as a result of the proliferation of the free offspring of miscegenation.

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, therefore, the actual revolution is placed outside the context of the South, yet its imaginary legacy in the South is performed by Sutpen's moving to Jefferson, as well as by the latent threats that are activated in the narrative by conforming to the threatening and bestial stereotypes of the African American and the mulatto. As Godden observes, "[g]iven that Faulkner wishes to foreground the continuous potential for revolution within the institution of slavery, he needs Haiti, the only successful black revolution. Given that he wishes to characterize the plantocracy as a class who suppress revolution, he requires that his ur-planter suppress the Haitian revolution and go on doing so" (689). Focusing on the suppressed slave revolt in Haiti, Stanchich argues that Faulkner "exposes the pathology of the colonizer but at the same time renders Haiti harmless through Sutpen's quelling of the slave uprising. Haiti's resistance may be portrayed, but its independence is null and void" (608). White supremacy is epitomized in the novel in a very similar way to Jim's ennoblement as a white colonizer in *Patusan*.<sup>477</sup> Godden goes further in interpreting the representation of the Haitian slaves by considering their double subjugation: "My point is finally a simple one: in Sutpen's slaves Faulkner creates an anomalous archaism; they are historically free and yet doubly constrained, by a fiction (*Absalom, Absalom!*) and by a counter-revolutionary violence (Sutpen's) that is necessary to the workings of the plantation system" (689).

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<sup>476</sup> Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony* 212. It is worth reading this book for a comparison between the legislation on interracialism in the French Antilles and the antebellum U. S. South, and its portrayal in literature.

<sup>477</sup> As Stanchich states: "the marginalized and 'uncivilized' portrayal of the Caribbean in the novel serves to construct and elevate a class-disadvantaged white, and to quiet the narrator's fears of the threat Haiti posed to pro-slavery ideology" (607).

Furthermore, Stanchich considers that the function of establishing an “otherness” in the story and, thus, a space that projects a shadow over the story of Thomas Sutpen, is embodied in the narrative by means of its marginal placement in the story. This allows her to state that “the marginal, the unnamed, assumed, but nonetheless useful presence of the Caribbean; the exploited, cartoonish architect; the imagined cache of Spanish coins; and the first-born rejected mulatto son—all make *Absalom, Absalom!* an American imperialist representation of the Caribbean” (616).

If the source was not ambivalent enough, the fact that the terms “West Indies” and “Haiti” seem to be used interchangeably contributes to creating much confusion about the interpretations discussed above. Grandfather reports Sutpen saying: “He went to the West Indies. That’s how he said it” (198). If we trace the instances when the place referred appears in the narrative, it is not until Quentin reports Grandfather telling him that they were “getting himself [Sutpen] and Grandfather both into that besieged Haitian room as simply as he got himself to the West Indies” (203) and when grandfather again refers to it in what do not appear to be words coming from Sutpen, “at the Haitian night itself” (209). Sutpen’s words are just “West Indies,” in some of which they also spoke French, as in Martinique and Guadalupe, and in one of which, Martinique, slavery was never abolished as a consequence of the Haitian revolution. Grandfather, Quentin and Shreve afterwards assume that Haiti is the island in the West Indies where Sutpen goes, yet the architect is from Martinique, and the historical background might fit this island better than Haiti. It is futile to argue over Faulkner’s precise intentions here, because the novel is confusing on purpose. However, what is clear is that there is an element of suggestiveness in the point that the characters take the West Indies for Haiti, because it is a familiar place and it has a long-standing and central significance in the Old South, and the myth that shapes its endurance.<sup>478</sup> The suggestion that the Southern Compsons and the Canadian friend would assume that Haiti was the place from which Sutpen’s “wild negroes” had come would be a logical consequence of their living and telling within the framework of the rhetorical tradition of the Southern myth.

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<sup>478</sup> A very useful tracing of the myth of Haiti and its relationship to miscegenation is found in Anna Brickhouse, “The Writing of Haiti: Pierre Faubert, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Beyond.” *American Literary History* 13.3 (Autumn 2001): 407-444.

By way of concluding our analysis of the introduction of a slave revolt in Haiti, we can see again how Faulkner uses a popular code in order to develop it in multiple directions that, placed in comparison and contrast to other narrative constituents, would produce a complex and rich motif in fiction. In this case in particular, Haiti works in accordance with its role in the discourse of slavery in the South, as well as the myth of the South: it activates the threatening racial atmosphere already created in the narrative, locating again the racial conflict and warning about the latent revolutionary content of slavery in the slaveholding South. This functions in the narrative as a mirror of the presumed latent rebelliousness of the creoles in New Orleans that will be revealed in Bon once he is discovered to be a mulatto. Therefore, the West Indian rebel slaves work again the potential rebellion of Sutpen's slaves, and the dreadful consequences of physical contact between the races, to foreshadow Charles Bon's personal racial rebellion, and to impregnate it with the meaning of the slave revolt that threatens, not only the name and status of a family, but the slaveholding system as a whole. Furthermore, as Glissant points out

En vérité, s'exprime l'intuition que l'entour assaille le comté, mais que celui-ci ne le sait pas. Faulkner désigne cet ailleurs, menaçant méconnu, chargé de tout cela qui fait problème. Il jette les prémisses d'une vérité : que le système de Plantation est perverti, ailleurs comme ici, et qu'il est vain de fonder sur lui. Et cette perversion, il la qualifie outrageusement : c'est la mélange, sanction inévitable, même si elle est paradoxale, de l'appropriation violente et de la loi inique de l'esclavage. (124)

Simultaneously, the historical reference to Haiti is distorted through the effects of fiction in a way that the avoidance of the actual visualization of the downfall of the plantocracy in the West Indies strongly emphasizes the claim of white supremacy. Hence, the narrative effects of Sutpen's experience in Haiti are rendered highly ambivalent through their constant dialogue with the other adjacent elements in the novel.

All the above analyzed motifs can help us understand the sophistication of Faulkner's literary representation of African Americans and the racial issues in *Absalom, Absalom!* If we step back for a moment from the details exposed, we can draw some conclusions.

We need to admit that Faulkner does not break stereotypes but rather he employs them in a very striking way, though common in the Southern literature of his time. Nevertheless, this assumption of the stereotypes includes the frame which embraced the racial discourse that came from the decades prior to the Civil War, and which had found legal formulations in the New South, especially in the wake of Reconstruction. This framework is the so called Myth of the Old South, the Southern Myth, or the Myth of the Lost Cause. As we have seen, the myth extols the ideals of the Plantation system, but it also contains its originary problems, which persisted in different ways in the New South. Among them, race relations were central. The insistent assumption of this myth in the narrator's minds 'naturalizes' and 'legitimizes' the use of racial stereotypes in the narrative. Among the narrators, Quentin suffers the burden of the nostalgic and nagging memory of the old times but preserves his personal experience of the reality of the South; by contrast, Shreve only possesses his own images, and the images he receives from Quentin's telling of the story. All narrators, therefore, tell the story from within the same given and discomforting pattern of figures and conflicts in relation to the Southern past.

Among the many other issues that come out of the memories of the Old South, we find what Davis labels the "Myth of the 'Negro.'" The narrators of the story incorporate the racial stereotypes present in the racist discourse with the paradoxical effect of both perpetuating the myth by nurturing a racial reading of reality, and confronting it by displaying its complexities. Given this frame, the modern reader is asked to participate in the interpretation of the story. The mythical framework is a guiding key for the reader that solicits the activation of its codified unities. Faulkner places as an apparent background signs that fully explain when they are compared and contrasted to the other events and characters in the story. Faulkner relies on the readers' cultural knowledge for their interpretation. This is not to say no other readers can understand *Absalom, Absalom!*, but it is certainly true that a culturally informed reader is best equipped to associate the greatest variety of elements here.

Certainly, African Americans seem to be what Philip Weinstein has called "marginalia" in the novel (*Faulkner's Subject* 43). But this background is alive. Indeed, Faulkner traces the background to inform or suggest things about the plot thread related to Sutpen's white

family. It is so in other ways too, as we have seen in the activation of Sutpen's wild slaves, and the episodes of merging, or the stereotypical construction of Charles Bon as "nigger." Faulkner does not need to explain but merely to present because the significance of the slaves, of the mulattoes, of Haiti, is ingrained in his culture. The reader is suggested a way to progressively acknowledge the centrality of racial issues in the familiar conflict, and in the context that stands in clear correspondance with Sutpen's story. Sutpen is almost a mirror for the Southern Lost Cause. Without the help of the reader's triggering of the stereotypes latent in the novel, it might seem that Shreve's attribution of a racial cause and his conclusion on miscegenation are both exaggerated. In actuality, they are perfectly congruous with the development of what is initially a racial background and later the driving force of the narrative.

In the novel, racial stereotypes are used as narrative forms, ways of telling a story. This is Faulkner's major achievement, an achievement that we have seen also in Conrad's work. In this sense, they accomplish many functions. They work to embody the narrative engima in the character of Bon; to create an atmosphere of fear and threat through the figures of the mulattoes, the slaves and the reference to the Haitian Revolution; and primarily to foreshadow the subsequent events and conflicts, thus guiding the plot and the gradual approach to the narrative engima.

Foreshadowing is the primary means of unraveling the story of the Sutpen family, since it establishes a chain between items of an apparently diverse nature. This is remarkably the case with the scenes of merging with the slaves, Clytie and Rosa's confrontations, the mulattoes themselves, and the attempts of "passing" and "interbreeding," which highlight the core of the question, the crossroads of kinship and race: miscegenation; another drawn idea is that of an inherent revolution that involves a threat to the white society, which is linked by the wilderness of Sutpen's slaves, the references to the West Indies and to the Haitian Revolution in particular, which will ultimately lie in the mulatto character of Bon—because he is supposedly revealed to be a "nigger" and thus to have attempted "passing." The poor whites' desire and eventual decision to fight against the masters reinforces the general pattern of revolt against social hierarchies. The fate of the supposed mulatto Charles

Bon is likewise foreshadowed in the story of his son, Charles Etienne Saint Valery Bon.

Apart from the narrative strategy of foreshadowing, the full use of the multiplicity of racial codes in a single story displays the contradiction and the fallacy inherent in essentializing views, such as the one condensed in stereotypes. We can see this utilization of the multiple forms of the mulatto (in his functions of either a tragic figure, a marginal man, a threat, or a “passer”) in the figures of Clytie, Charles Bon, and Charles Etienne Saint Valery Bon. The loyal and the bestial slaves, and African Americans are seen in the Southern slaves and in Clytie in contrast to the West Indian slaves, Charles Bon, and Charles Etienne. The overthrow of the slave system is epitomized in the Haitian revolt, at the same time that it is rewritten and put down in a fiction. The idea of clear racial distinctions is endorsed in the stereotypes, but it is challenged in the encounters of Rosa Coldfield with Clytie, as well as in Charles Bon’s racial uncertainty. And the portrayal of the relations between poor whites and Anglo-Saxon Southern gentlemen, and between poor whites and slaves is no less ambivalent.

All these racial codes work to set down the principal issue that ties them all together: the debate over miscegenation/integration or “pure races”/segregation. What is remarkable is that Faulkner combines all these stereotypes and gradually and artistically makes them appear to conduct the reader toward a particular, racial view of the story—on that would seem to support a segregated society—as well as to confront the reader with the contradictory elements, which we find not only in the contrast of a complex reality to a codified racial discourse, but even in the racial stereotyping that conforms to this very discourse, eroding by these means the system of beliefs that sustained Jim Crow. This last interrogation is strongly underscored in the light of the eroded credibility of the narrative voices seen in the previous chapter.

Finally, Faulkner assumes the stereotypes—since they are part of his culture—but he displays their multiple forms in a way that the inner contradictions between racial discourse and reality, and the internal debates such as segregation or integration, unfold and ensnare the reader. The evidence of these complexities is what, in my view, Ralph Ellison had in mind when he said that Faulkner is “more willing

perhaps than any other artist to start with the stereotype, accept it as true, and then seek out the human truth which it hides.”<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Ralph Ellison, “Twentieth-Century Literature and the Black Mask of Humanity.” *Shadow and Act*. 1953. New York: Random House, 1972, 43.



## 6. CONCLUSIONS. BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND STEREOTYPE: AMBIVALENT VOICES BESPEAK A HEART IN CONFLICT

In his address upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950, William Faulkner reminded young writers of the substance of literature in an enduring statement of his view of the art:

Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. . . . Because of this, the young man or woman writing today has forgotten the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat. He must learn them again. He must teach himself the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice.<sup>480</sup>

Both Conrad and Faulkner shared the feeling that the proper domain of literature were subjects struggling with both their emotional and rational relationship with the world. It is precisely their similar personal anguish that thoroughly unveils the common texture of their writings. In this final chapter I shall compare the two novels by interlacing the conclusions reached as a result of separate analyses of aspects of narrative voice and racial representation, in order to demonstrate how the author's internal conflicts in relation to the discourses of race were transformed into appropriate subject-matter for literature, as well as how they were condensed, filtered, and sustained in the fictions.

*Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* are two novels that some well-known critics—including J. Hillis Miller and Albert Guerard, and most recently Peter Mallios and Grazyna Branny—have compared formally, for the most part, but with a strong awareness of the pressure the authors felt in relation to their historical context. They are certainly sensitive, in the first case, to the distressful experience of the sea in relation to the discourse of the British imperialism, and the role of

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<sup>480</sup> William Faulkner, *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters*. Ed. James B. Meriwether. New York: Random House, 2004, 119.

Southern discourse of history and race in the United States in the latter. However, a more comprehensive study comparing both authors with regards to narrative form and historical discourses of “race” was still essential. As it has been argued in the introduction, although Joseph Conrad wrote from the late 1890s until the moment of his death in 1924, whereas William Faulkner in fact began writing when Conrad died and continued to do so until his own sudden death in 1962, there is solid basis for the comparison of the two novels in relation to both the effects of these discourses on the authors, as well as their tendency to search the historical past which they felt to be the foundation of their respective contemporary realities. Both the discourse of the British colonizer around 1900 and that of racial segregation in the 1930s begin to encounter serious problems with regards to their legitimacy. J. A. Hobson is one prominent example, followed by other critics of imperialism, but the criticism was also present on another level in Yeats and Stevenson’s doubts at the end of his career with regards to the apologetic discourse of British imperialism.<sup>481</sup> These cracks in the arguments would deepen in the following decades, remarkably to the 1920s and 1930s. More intensely yet, in the 1930s the segregation in the South of the United States was being seriously questioned, and in a more public way from the end of the First World War, with figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois, and the work of the NAACP—even though the Supreme Court had managed to overlook for decades the reasons that would later provide the basis for declaring the unconstitutionality of the segregation laws and practices, too worried about the policies outside the United States’ borders and the legal treatment of its new colonies. The expansion of the Civil Rights movement has its critical point of departure in the timid steps made in the context of racial strife in the midst of which Faulkner wrote *Absalom, Absalom!*

The comparative basis of the historical contexts, therefore, is mainly articulated by the fundamental argument of racial discrimination at the basis of the discourse of both British imperialism in the last decades of the nineteenth century, as well as in the corpus of arguments that legitimized the discriminatory system of segregation. This racial discourse originates in the same rhetoric as elaborated by a set of discussions and books by “scientists,” which helped to firmly establish

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<sup>481</sup> See specifically, Bernard Porter, *Critics of Empire: British Radical attitudes to colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914*. London and New York: MacMillan and St. Martin’s Press, 1968.

some of the common images that had previously portrayed the differences between societies all over the world. Certainly, as Andrew Porter remarks when summarizing the impact of racial discourse in the mid-late nineteenth century British Empire, “[s]tereotypes multiplied, and were widely popularized, often in arguments about the inevitability of social-Darwinist, interracial struggles for survival. Expressed, for example, by Benjamin Kidd in terms of the superior ‘social efficiency’ of the Anglo-Saxon race, they made Imperial rule seem less hopeful and more necessary. This was memorably captured by Rudyard Kipling’s exhortation in 1899 to those other Anglo-Saxons, the Americans, to join the British in taking up ‘the White Man’s burden’ of rule over ‘new-caught’ sullen peoples, half-devil and half-child.’ They reinforced administrative authoritarianism and reluctance to involve local peoples—especially the western-educated—in colonial government.”<sup>482</sup> The circulation of these ideas allowed the development in moments such as the 1850s and 1860s in the South of the United States a whole apparatus of proslavery and pro-discrimination arguments. Some of these, which referred to a biological difference between “races,” were to endure in the postbellum South, along with other arguments that based the differences on culture thanks to which liberals would consent to the doctrine of “separate but equal.”

However, every context is particular in many ways and cannot be understood as the same as another. This is the reason why I have taken great pains to provide a historical framework for the nuances that shape the racial stereotypes that, nonetheless, clearly have common features in both discourses, as we have seen. Certainly, there are relevant differences in the presentation of the stereotypes, and the debates they embody. In Conrad’s time there was no discussion about the equality of “races,” or between the colonized peoples and the metropolis. “Races” were still classified in neat hierarchies grounded in biological and evolutionary distinctions, as we have seen with the anti-imperialist example of J. A. Hobson. By Faulkner’s time, however, there was a rhetoric of equality that is even present in the formulation of the system of segregation as “separate but equal.” This partly explains the flatness of the stereotypes and the sharpness of the color line in Joseph Conrad’s novels, in counterpoint to Faulkner’s, where

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<sup>482</sup> Andrew Porter, “Introduction: Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth Century.” *The Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Andrew Porter. *The Oxford History of the British Empire*. Ed.-in-chief Wm. Roger Louis. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999, 24.

the ongoing blurring of the biracial society is central to the discussion. Although both authors are concerned with whiteness, Conrad deals with this category more directly, through the long interrogation of the gentleman; meanwhile, Faulkner's concern with it shall be seen as reflected in the racial mirror of the mulatto, and thus indirectly. Furthermore, while on the one hand the presence of the "other" in Conrad is much more benevolent and relaxed because, being overseas, the colonized in Malaysia do not threaten British dominion; on the other hand, the presence of African Americans on the cusp of Emancipation represents a major social fear which explains the apocalyptic perception of miscegenation, and the creation of a real atmosphere of terror and tragedy in *Absalom, Absalom!*—in contrast to a morally tragic atmosphere in *Lord Jim*. Consequently, Conrad's treatment of racial difference is more clearly a matter of morality than in Faulkner, where racial issues, albeit moral, have a more explicit factual basis: the Southern writer focuses factual conflictive practices that affect the established racial order, specifically that of miscegenation and the resulting opportunity of "passing." Also, there is a difference in the nature of the historical problems discussed. The debate over the ideal behavior of the colonizer refers to racial distinctions that are at the basis of the discussion, but they are implied in it rather than being the point of the debate, as it is the case with miscegenation. Conversely, the debate over miscegenation implies the one over segregation or integration, which is wider because it concerns access to rights and power in the political, social, and economic arena. These latter spheres are overtly present in the British debates about patterns of colonization. Thus, although many features of the stereotypes presented in both novels are coincident, each set articulates a different problem, rather than adherence to stereotypes shaping the same problem. The racial stereotypes serve to display it in the strict measure in which they functioned in their historical context.

As we have seen, the racial ideas and arguments were part of more complex structures of thought which were highly codified with the aim of influencing—often successfully—opinions about the problems of everyday life in England and the South, and that were prepared to endure for several decades (up to the First World War, as the approximate date provided by historians in the case of England—with some exceptions like John MacKenzie, who shows that popular ideas of imperialism can be traced until the 1960s—and longer in the United States, at least up to the 1960s, yet with the First World War as a

crucial turning point in the heightening of the debate over segregation, and the 1950s as the start of the Civil Rights Movement.) British imperialism channeled racial ideas mainly through public education, entertainment (theater, music-hall, cinema, exhibitions), propaganda societies, commercial advertising, and travel writings and the Adventure novel. We may find a parallel in the discourse of the “Southern myth,” principally diffused by the Plantation novel, but more notably by the publicized practice of oratory, and later during the first decades of the twentieth century through black stereotypes in the minstrel shows, vaudeville dramatic pieces, music, radio, and film, a popular culture that was still dominated by both whites and whiteness, as Langston Hughes decried in his impressive essay “Curtain Time,” as late as circa 1950.<sup>483</sup> British imperialism and the New South creed helped to create an audience that understood and provided certain patterns of identification (or “identities” if you wish) that aimed at creating a minimal consensus and eventual support for the practices of the British Government and the Southern State Courts. The creation of a minimal consensus produced a community of values entrenched in those discourses: readers and listeners were compelled to believe. Not only values were mapped in these discourses, but an entire worldview. The imperialist discourse explained the mysteries of why some had more privileges than others, and the right to rule in the British territories; likewise, the Southern myth provided the foundations for a new order of social, economic, and political relations following what was seen as an unjust defeat, as a counter to the Northern explanation of the Civil War.

As Walter Benjamin noticed with the advent of the Modern world, orality both served and demanded the commonality. The storyteller is the essential figure that at once needs a frame of assumed values in order to be understood, and contributes to the process of repetition that turns opinions into arguments and arguments into beliefs. In its working through repetition and implied meanings which demand of

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<sup>483</sup> Langston Hughes, “Curtain Time.” *LHP* 227 (ca. 1950?). *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*. . Ed. Christopher C. De Santis. Vol. 9 of *The Collective Works of Langston Hughes*. Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 2002. 294-305. See also George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. 1971. Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan UP, 1987; Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of African and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale UP, 1991; and Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York: Pantheon, 1998.

few indications to be understood, the oral telling of stories both connects the past with the present and guarantees the perpetuation of the underlying codes. It is not strange, thus, that such systems of codified beliefs as the British imperialist discourse of the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and the Southern myth during the New South era, source to orality as their most appropriate means of transmission.

Indeed, the British Merchant Marine created its own way of transmitting stories and news to mariners and colonizers that came back and forth from the British colonies. Those stories contributed significantly to mapping the paths traced, and the enterprises engaged in by the sailors and merchants, to make their experiences comprehensible and part of the wider course of history. In fact, the frame narrator in *Heart of Darkness* alludes to this particular community of values, referred as the “bond” or the “fellowship” of the sea when he says “between us there was, I have already said somewhere, the bond of the sea. Besides holding our hearts together through long periods of separation, it had the effect of making us tolerant of each other’s yarns—and even convictions.”<sup>484</sup> Some of this language, notably the description of the access to power in the colonies, and the portrayal of the peoples that inhabited them, appears simultaneously in the travel writings as the result of the imperial experience, which was to be presented in the metropolis. The Adventure novel further elaborated the experiences overseas by reinforcing the stereotypes and patterns propagated by the metropolis. Fiction nourished ideology as much as ideology stimulated fiction.

On the other hand, the South had a tradition of oratory that grew from the discussions over slavery, and that was later continued in the New South’s construction of its perspective on the history of the region from the antebellum period onward, in the decade from mid-1880s to mid-1890s. In the South we do find equivalents of the Adventure novel, yet probably not in the proportion of the British phenomenon. The plantation novels or later revivals of the genre in the first decades of the twentieth century did achieve popularity (with the very significant examples of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Uncle Remus*, and *Gone with the Wind*), effectively conveying in general terms the clichés

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<sup>484</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Youth and other two stories*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924, 45. See also, C. F. Burgess, *The Fellowship of the Craft: Conrad on Ships and Seamen and the Sea*. Port Washington and London: Kennikat Press, 1976.

established by the New South perspective of the slaveholding society of the antebellum South, or the Old South. However, as a relevant distinction between the racial discourse in Britain and the U.S. South, the discourse of the Old South, in contrast to the North, was intensely delivered by politicians through the traditional practice of the oratory in the region. This does not diminish the fact that the nostalgic views and symbols that shaped the ideas of the South were present or elaborated in literature, it merely highlights the importance of another means of linguistic diffusion, which is neither fictional nor presented in written form. Of course these ideas were present in and have partly defined what has been understood as Southern literature at least until Faulkner's lifetime, when the Agrarians—also known as the Fugitives—manifested their nostalgic endorsement of an agrarian South in “I Will Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition” (1930).<sup>485</sup>

What is relevant for us here is that oral forms served the purpose of these discourses, since they were repetitive and they actually “created” a sense of commonality through words. The codification of features or elements of the discourse are, therefore, easily identifiable linguistically speaking. There is an expected and unsurprised response when Marlow talks about “the distinction of being white,” or when he equates Jim with a God in Patusan. The audience would also be ready to agree that the slaves smelled more like animals than humans, as Rosa Coldfield describes them. This is already present in the language that creates the images. A vast amount of illustrations and images in the propaganda of the British Empire during the period from 1870 to 1914 (found in the theater, music-halls, commercial advertisement, posters, picture postcards, literature, or exhibitions) defined ways of seeing that made manifest ways of thinking; such is the case with the illustrations and motifs of African Americans during the Jim Crow era. Thus, there were already codified images and codified words that shaped the language, and that were, of course, distorting actual historical experience.

The use of and allusion to this fixed language to speak about each element of the stories allows constructing upon supposition. The stereotypes, read as fixed images, appear to say much more in the quickest way possible. For storytellers talking to their correspondent audiences, some meanings could be activated without the need of

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<sup>485</sup> New York and London: Harper, 1930.

making them fully explicit. And thus, when transmitting a discourse of identification (or, again, of “identity” if you wish), orality works as a mode of speaking which functions upon suppositions, upon implicatures. Thus, when Marlow affirms, “he was one of us,” his listeners do not need the referent of this personal pronoun “us” to be mentioned, because it can just be implied. Likewise, when the anonymous authors of the pamphlet that coined the word “miscegenation” mentioned the happy blending of the races, they immediately knew that this would provoke repulsion because it contradicted the powerful argument in the proslavery South that saw miscegenation leading to the disappearance of ‘white purity.’ The authors did even dare to draw upon their supposition of the values propagated by many Southerners to imbue the text with a sought-after contrarian point of view. Thus, they did not manifest their argument explicitly but activated the divergence with social values, very much like Shreve’s prediction about the bleaching of North-American people.

Yet this is the question facing us: What are the effects of orality when it is written, and furthermore, when it is used in Modern fiction? In the very idea of writing orality there is a paradox that empowers at the same time that it weakens what is said. Benjamin noticed how the incapacity in written texts of maintaining a group of listeners who share a community of values as well as a moment and a space had a devastating effect in terms of mutual understanding. The writer cannot achieve the “phatic” function of the narrative, in opposition to a speaker who can listen to and see the reaction of her or his audience to verify understanding. The intimacy of the speaker with the audience is replaced by the intimacy with himself or herself in a way that the values that are present do not require any more consent from the addressed. This is due to the fact that the audience has increased so much in number that it is impossible to strive for any homogeneous response to the text. This fact gives a much wider frame to the written text than to the oral one. Unfortunately, a discussion of the differences between oral and written texts is beyond the scope of this study.

Nevertheless, it is not beyond our reach to make some remarks on the use of orality in Modern literature based on the examples of Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* This is a clearly understudied issue in the theory of narrative for which this

thesis intends to provide merely a starting point. It is possible to assert with conviction as a result of my research that the use of the oral traditions that shaped the British Merchant Marine's and the oratory of the Old South Myth has profound destabilizing effects in both novels. The use of orality is thus twofold. Certainly, on the one hand, it performs a revitalization of past ways of storytelling against more modern textual forms by reproducing the power of the skilled storyteller on the verandah to build up a long story from many sources, and by maintaining a high degree of rhetorical elaboration that conducts the plot of the narrative. In *Absalom, Absalom!* the empowerment of orality engages the structures of Southern oratory, which are the most appropriate to narrating the elements of history that are embedded in Sutpen's story. Oratory partly restores the erosion of narrative authority produced by the subjective perspective and the limitation of knowledge, by appealing to powerful mandatory arguments shaped in a clearly authoritative rhetoric in the community, as Ross has argued. By means of reproducing the dynamics of knowing and telling in the oral traditions, *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* challenge new ways of telling that have gained influence lately to the point of virtually substituting old ways of knowing. This is a challenge to the modernization of societies.

On the other hand, however, the very adoption of orality in these novels allows establishing a distance between the prospective communities of listeners created for and by the traditional storyteller, and the wide readership that would have access to the texts. This is worked out principally in two ways: first, by juxtaposing writing and telling in the novels; secondly and even more effectively, by using orality to explore a narrative voice that simultaneously invites the reader to embrace and to mistrust the oral storytellers, and the values of the communities they regenerate.

In *Lord Jim* the devastating consequences of adopting orality and writing in the novel appear in the juxtaposition of the sections told by Marlow, and the written end of Jim's story that the privileged man receives, as noted before. The story of the glorification of Lord Jim in Patusan corresponds to Marlow's oral storytelling. In Marlow's writings, the unfathomable reliance on Gentleman Brown's account of the story, and of that by Tamb' Itam, as well as Jim's fateful decision to let Brown escape at the expense of endangering the whole Patusani population, overshadow the first oral part of the story. Besides, the

written account would be the only one not widely known, since the documents are private. With regards to the Patusan section, the wider audience would know, by word of mouth, what resembles an Adventure novel, and would later receive in writing only the critical presentation thereof. Alternatively, the section of the *Patna* resembles a modern narrative because it is so doubtful that it lends credence to a multiplicity of readings; by contrast, the Patusan section conforms better to the genre of the Imperial romance when it is oral, supporting a very fixed reading of the relationship between colonizer and colonized. In this sense, orality contributes to making the voice of Marlow doubtful in the first part of the novel, and therefore profoundly Modern, as well as serving to glorify the figure of Jim when the story of Patusan activates the codes shared in the education of sailors, merchants, and colonizers in the widest sense. Orality is therefore the main source of authority as well as an unsuitable means to telling a story that is much more complicated than it can be told.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* the presence of authoritative written texts is reduced to the bare minimum: a confusing letter by Charles Bon, and a letter by Mr Compson announcing the Rosa Coldfield's death are the only written scraps of the story. There are no other documents to rely upon. The whole story is constructed in several conversations of people who have imbibed the Southern oratory, or that have a literary talent that surely helps them reproduce some of its formal patterns. Authority in the narrative is for the most part bestowed on the storytellers, but the fact that there is no written account of the story functions as a tormenting lack that settles the whole upon the grounds of memory, and of considerable uncertainty. The contrast between writing and telling is not emphasized in this novel to the same extent as in *Lord Jim*, although the uses of orality have very similar effects in the construction of narrative voice, as we shall see presently.

Nevertheless, a last turn of the screw in relation to the juxtaposition of writing and telling is common to both novels on the metafictional level. Thus, in *Absalom, Absalom!* Rosa Coldfield tells Quentin: "So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it. You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazines" (7). Indeed, the novel talks metafictionally about the text we hold, and this

becomes another way of seeing orality in dialogue with the also unstable form of writing—ironically we can even see corrections, or latest accounts of the first published text, as other variations resembling new oral accounts. Likewise, *Lord Jim* produces a similar effect by introducing a written text that narrates the end of Jim. This strange unknown narrator that has been sometimes associated with the privileged man—although the critics’ contradictory views are not very helpful in settling the matter—who might have handed, sold, or written himself this text—as Miguel de Cervantes supposedly does with Cide Hamete Benengeli’s unfinished manuscript of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*—and that might be the reason why we can read a novel mysteriously titled *Lord Jim*. Indeed, as critics have noted in Conrad’s novel the effects of this written paratext are tremendous, since the title provides a discordant point of view to the story as a whole.<sup>486</sup> Evidently, *Absalom, Absalom!* invites the reader to understand the story in the mold of the biblical tale of King David, which belongs to the very fundamental text upon which the Myth of the South is constructed upon. This title provides the novel with a forewarning that speaks the tragic tone of the novel; yet Conrad’s paratext suggests an irony: Who is going to be called “Lord Jim” in Imperial Britain? Is this a reference to the imprecise translation of Tuan Jim that the frame narrator is using? Is it a way of conveying the undeclared ambitions of glory and heroism unspeakable yet spoken by Marlow and Jim, or perhaps an indicator of what the latter is hiding—his last name—which is a clear reference to his shameful deed? And thus, once again, writing functions—as in the first four chapters, which do not presuppose orality in the novel—to unveil the irony in *Lord Jim*. Seen from this angle, orality in these modern written texts helps to create ambivalence through its inadequacy in a new yet aversive context.

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<sup>486</sup> David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan’s *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* defines “paratext” as “Every book contains the text of at least one work; but, if the text is to be accessible, the book must include additional textual matter, which Genette has usefully dubbed the ‘paratext.’ The ensemble of materials involved in the paratext is variable, and any attempted at general listing must remain open-ended. Taking novels as an example, however, any of the following would belong to their paratexts: titles and subtitles (of chapters, sections, and volumes as well as the whole work), epigraphs, dedications, prefaces, afterwords, running heads, the copyright page, and all jacket copy” (London and New York: Routledge, 2005, 419). See Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. 1987. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

The reflection on orality as a destabilizing factor when used in the modern narrative does not arise principally from the reflections on the nature of these two modes of language, but rather from its use as a narrative technique in fiction. This is due to the fact that orality allows the author to construct several narrators that tell or retell a story, while inviting a problematic presentation of the principles of access to knowledge, narrative authority, the suitability of linguistic communication, and reliability. These factors are precisely the ones that permit us to identify a modern use of narrative voice that in turn would help produce an unstable rendition of racial stereotypes.

Joseph Conrad and William Faulkner utilize orality to construct narrative voices that tell the story in the presence of an audience, for the most part, within the fiction. We can certainly identify two levels of reception of the message communicated, one within the novel, and one outside. These narratees are figures that in their role as listeners are shaped as a community of listeners, placed in their appropriate narrative situations of the conversations on the verandah, or in the domestic space of a Southern home on a September afternoon and evening. There is a focus on the listeners—yet they are for the most part silent, or passive, or just distracted—that keeps the reader aware of the oral quality of the words read in the novel. This allows the juxtaposition of voices that through their telling filter their doubts, their feelings, their judgments, their gaps in memory and knowledge. Orality renders the narrators unstable in what they say, not only in the sense that they are being subjective, but they are performing a great effort that has constitutive weaknesses. Thus, the oral nature of the narrative voices in the novel reinforces their frailness.

Moving beyond the relationship between orality and the shaping of historical discourses, and shifting our gaze to what was happening in narrative by the end of the nineteenth century, we notice a tendency towards the exploration of narrative voice, especially in the literary project of Henry James, and later by authors such as Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, or Virginia Woolf. As it is well known, narrative voice becomes more inconsistent, more sharpened, more subjective, and less reliable. But if Henry James did not dare to obscure the story the narrators were telling to what he considered excess, Conrad did push this boundary by increasing the “wordy” or “hyperphasic” speech of captain Marlow and maintaining a larger distance between the narrator and the story told. There is a frequently

acknowledged opacity in Jim's story that, although it does not refrain him from telling it, does produce the effect of rendering him as the main obstacle as well as the only conveyer of the story. The oral performance lends verisimilitude to the fiction because it explains the retelling of Jim's story; conversely, it also provides instability, since the audience only have access to one of the accounts of the story, yet presumes that other retellings might contain additional information, or simply another mood in relation to the main character.

Faulkner worked this last point to exhaustion by constructing a multiplicity of narrative voices that amplified the differences between the versions of a single story due to their individual personalities, varied backgrounds, different access to information, and prejudices. The juxtaposition of narrative voices both helps to construct a thirteen way of looking at a blackbird, and starts a process of questioning the accounts enabled by the detection of contradictions, lacks of evidence, constricting judgment, and literal invention. The erosion of narrative authority reaches its signaling peak in Faulkner through other narrative voices. First, with a frame narrator that, in lending some credence to what the narrators say, nevertheless keeps an ironic distance by scattering concessive remarks throughout a telling that he just about manages to concede is "probably true enough." If, however, the similarly suspicious frame narrator helps to build the authorial contrast with the personalized characters on the more internal narrative level in both novels, and thus consents to remaining a supervisor of the narrative instead of its primary narrator; nevertheless, *Absalom, Absalom!* demonstrates much more clearly than *Lord Jim* the erosion of narrative authority through the comparison and contrast of several narrators of the same story placed on the same narrative level—and thus holders of the same narrative authority. We will return later to the construction of narrative reliability in the novel. It is worth noting, however, that in the analysis of these effects I have noticed that narrative authority is conspicuously understudied. My insights here shall be taken thus as preliminary steps in the study of this relevant narrative principle.

As we have seen, the strategy of the narrative enigma is the device that, as Piglia suggested, is the driving force behind several possible accounts by different narrators around a secret in the story. To be more precise, in the story or Jim, Marlow summons a secret that he uses as the narrative enigma of his telling. The secret concerns

whether Jim is “one of us,” as he appears to be, or, in other words, whether he is the individual he resembles. Marlow introduces into his story the ingredients that give him the impression that something about Jim does not ring true. In turn, Marlow puts this secret, to which the audience has no access—and neither would anyone in the future since Jim is dead—at the center of his telling, making it the motor of the plot: the plot would move around and towards the closest approach to the secret possible. A similar movement is at the heart of *Absalom, Absalom!* There is a secret that in this case does not emerge from a personal impression, but rather from a fact—the murder of Charles Bon by Henry Sutpen—the reasons for which, however, are unknown. This secret is in turn placed at the center of the narrative, principally by Mr Compson, who establishes a similar pattern in the unfolding of the plot to that of *Lord Jim*. Thereafter Quentin and Shreve will try to find out what brought Henry to kill Bon. Thus, the secret of the story is again introduced as a narrative enigma. This is not necessarily so in literature. In fact, this is a distinction that is worth noting in the explication of our perspective on the workings of this narrative strategy. In many novels and short stories there is a secret but the reader shares it with someone else. A pertinent example here shall illustrate the difference. In Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* there is also a secret of “passing” hidden in the story: Thomas à Becket Driscoll does not know he was swapped in the cradle with Valet de Chambre, and that he is in fact a “passer” without knowing it. The secret that Tom is in fact Roxana’s son is shared with the reader all the time, so that in this case the secret of the story is not the narrative enigma—the enigma the reader needs to resolve with the narrator’s guidance. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, as in *Lord Jim*, as well as *Light in August*, or *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*—but also in previous stories such as James’ “The Figure in the Carpet”—the narrators make of the secret the beginning and endpoint of their narratives: neither the narrators nor the readers know the secret. We are uncertain in three of the aforementioned novels about the real knowledge possessed by the most central characters—Charles Bon, Jim, and James Wait; we are sure that Joe Christmas does not know about his racial identity. Thus, the comparison of our two novels allows us to see a particular twofold secret, which works on two levels, within the story and in the level of the diegesis.

Furthermore, the secret is unsolved in both novels. Marlow finds himself with limited information and a proximity to the character that

prevents him from seeing Jim clearly, and consequently the doubt is always there, until the very last moment of his narrative, when Jim “passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten, unforgiven, and excessively romantic” (246). Parallel to this, in *Absalom, Absalom!* Shreve does apparently resolve the narrative enigma by pointing at miscegenation as the key explanation of Henry’s murder of Bon. However, the fact that the conversation in which Sutpen tells Henry that Bon’s mother was part ‘Negro’ is narrated in a highly ambiguous voice that is too reminiscent of Shreve’s, and more importantly, the fact that the unreliable Shreve presumes that information to be true, and to be the very reason why Henry killed Bon, which precipitated the downfall of Sutpen’s Hundred, leaves the initial enigma untouched. The solution Shreve finds is so expected within the clichés that inhabit the entrails of the Southern myth, and so nicely set forth by his playful and fantasizing discourse that the narrative enigma is only virtually solved, since in actuality it remains encrypted and forever buried.

And yet a challenging shift still needs to be introduced here: as the analyses undertaken show, it is definitely arguable that the secret is primarily a “racial” secret. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow understands Jim’s secret on the basis of the contrast with the Malay and the Muslim pilgrims who are spectators of his actions. Jim seems to be an English gentleman but his behavior does not bear out these expectations. His appearance as “one of us” primarily implies the fact that he is white and “Anglo-Saxon.” In this sense, the only possible convincing argument that he is still “one of us” is his contrast to “them,” the image of the Malay from the colonizer’s racialised perspective. This point of view restores the sharp discursive differences between colonizers and colonized on the basis of racial beliefs, which are translated in the fiction through flat racial stereotypes. The doubt about Jim concerns him as an individual (who is this subject?) as well as the collectivity he apparently stands for (Who are “us”?). In Britain this collectivity is defined racially in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and at the turn of the twentieth.

*Absalom, Absalom!* also racializes the secret in the story, but much later in the narrative. Chapter VIII ends with the conversation in the bivouac camp between Thomas Sutpen and his son Henry, in which Thomas apparently tells Henry that Bon is part negro, information that Shreve subsequently assumes in what is clearly his narrative voice.

At this point, the novel solicits the reader to return to the beginning of the story and to understand the secret as a racial one. The question: Why did Henry kill Bon? Is transformed into a more specific one: Was Bon part 'Negro'? It is through this new question that the whole story's initial racial background discloses its primordial functions in the plot of the novel. Furthermore, the fact that the secret is unsolved renders Charles Bon's racial identity ambiguous, and so this very light-skinned character might or might not be a mulatto performing a "passing." We do not know for sure because the narrative is ambiguous, and specifically the narrative voice. When leaving the secret of "passing" unsolved, Faulkner uses a cultural practice that had secrecy as its essential virtue to shape the unsolved narrative enigma in the novel. In this way, the author shapes a perfect fiction that projects the ultimate fear of miscegenation, while introducing ambivalence towards it, since the character might be "passing," or else he might have been presumed—and thus probably misjudged—to be "passing."

Considered in strict narrative terms, the unsolved narrative enigma and undisclosed secret in the story has the effect of challenging the reader's expectations and leaving the accounts provided in doubt. The voices become still more delicate, the plot a fragile bundle of threads skillfully weaved but still not enough to draw the figure in the fabric. Certainly, as Allon White acutely suggested when discussing *Heart of Darkness*, "[d]issolution into the shades of intangibility places the active force of his narrative in the noumenal margins of something approached but never reached. This preserved distance which creates the aura of the work is necessarily an external relationship between the 'impenetrable' core of the narrative (personality/territory) and the outer zone of conjecture and uncertainty which envelops it."<sup>487</sup> This purely narrative device is much more potent when the secret refers to cultural or historical issues, since what might be regarded for the moment as just the production of narrative ambiguity is transformed into something of a radically different nature: another kind of ambiguity, of uncertainty, which creates ambivalence in matters of politics, culture, and morality.

The secret drives the plot when converted into a narrative enigma, and makes possible the rise of multiple accounts of the story, which by sourcing to orality as a mode of narrative bring in an ideological

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<sup>487</sup> Allon White, *The Uses of Obscurity: The Fiction of Early Modernism*. London: Routledge, 1981, 112.

corpus of values and fixed codes. This is the very structural core that supports the sophisticated development of narrative voice in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!*

With the exception of the frame narrators, the narrative voices in these novels are oral. Since the voices are oral, they are notably personalized. Orality is not required to personalize a voice, but it is awkward with regards to literary conventions to have a non-characterized narrative voice that is oral. Both Conrad and Faulkner do not seem to challenge that convention but rather to benefit from it. Indeed, their oral voices are highly personalized. They are involved in the narrative in different degrees: Marlow as a friend, and, in many cases, as a father-figure; Rosa Coldfield as family; Mr Compson as friend and neighbor; Quentin as neighbor; Shreve just through his friendship with Quentin. Due to their different relationships to the story, they have diverse sources of information, which are primarily first-hand in the cases of Marlow and Rosa Coldfield, but also on many occasions for Mr Compson and to a lesser extent Quentin. However, a lot of information comes from different indirect witnesses to the point that some parts of it come very close to rumors. Faced with the presence of significant gaps of information, the narrators bring that uncertain information to the story in order to chain a plot. This is especially true in *Absalom, Absalom!*, as we have seen. On other occasions, the secondary sources of information come from characters whose authority is not clear or is directly questioned by the narrative, such the “town”’s beliefs or Gentleman Brown’s account. Even though there is actual progress in the understanding of the story, there is still insufficient information to work out the totality of knowledge required to solve the enigma, or the lateral enigmas mainly engendered by Sutpen’s story: “yet something is missing,” “It just does not explain” (83).

Added to the limitation of knowledge in personalized narrators, there is the problem of the unsuitability of language in the narration of a “real” (in the fiction, of course) story, to which both characters-narrators and frame narrators object. If their idea is to narrow Derrida’s *différance* between words and reality in order to convey the most accurate feelings of the inexplicable unseen, the limitations of language severely undermine the aspirations of the narrators. All these modulations of the narrative bring to the foreground of the novel a strong metafictional sense that we frequently feel obscures the story, a

kind of “hyperphasia” that in its purpose of warning about the problems of telling in fact ends up actually obscuring what we expect to be told. Thereby, they introduce narrative ambiguity in the telling in a way that not only the story but also its telling frequently produce unbearable or irresolvable difficulties.

Within this complex narrative structure, both Conrad and Faulkner elaborate narrative voice outstandingly in the panorama of the Modern novel. Both face the problem of reliability. In their exploration of the nuances of narrative reliability, Conrad seems to be following the path started by Henry James; and Faulkner that traced by Conrad. As we have seen, the issue of narrative reliability/unreliability is far more complex than one might conclude from otherwise excellent efforts to analyse this key narrative technique attempted thus far. The issue is complex, and only the abstract thinking which the readings resolve into concepts of narrative theory can help understand the functioning of the technique. In regards to the study of this device, there is an essential misperception in the theoretical identification of the problem that underlies what critics have distinguished as unreliable narration: following Wayne Booth’s provisional labeling of the distinction between reliable and unreliable narration, we have elaborated these concepts without reflecting enough on the narrative concern behind Booth’s distinction. In fact, it has been my claim that if we address this concern as the problem of “reliability” instead of the problem of unreliability, we can avoid the confusing and often unsatisfying distinctions. The concern responds to the question: How much can recipients of a narrative believe its speaker? What Booth was trying to understand is Henry James’ elaboration of reliability in the narrative, which the author resolves through the construction of unreliable narrators. It is reliability as a problem that compels writers to explore different approaches in their works. Thus, as we have seen, the problem of reliability concerns both the construction of “reliable narrators,” “unreliable narrators,” and other degrees of reliability, as well as the multiple procedures that intervene in the exploration of this issue.

Once these subtle distinctions in the vocabulary are established, I will continue with some remarks that aim at suggesting further perspectives that require either more concepts, or more flexibility in the analysis of the current narratological concepts. Many critics feel uncomfortable with the concept of narrative unreliability opposed to

narrative reliability in literature. They argue that all narrators are unreliable to some extent, since all have limitations in their storytelling. In contrast to what many critics might fear, this is neither a problem of the honesty of the author, nor a problem of the truth spoken by the novel. Fiction is fiction and we are not discussing the truths of the novels as a means to teaching the audiences. Nevertheless, I hope to have demonstrated that not all narrators are unreliable in the sense that narrative criticism has established the concept. I agree that the limits for these concepts are not easy to define. However, I have shown that there are novels in which the concern over reliability is central to the narrative. In these novels the problem of language in the transmission of the story stands at the heart of the narrative, and cannot be thought of as just a means to deliver the story, but rather as the very conflict the novel presents. Narrative voice becomes the very nub in these works. As Kathleen Wall argued, it is when this feature of discourse is made problematic with regards to the degree of reliability of the narrator in relation to the story that we can discuss narrative reliability as an issue, as a problem. That is, when the novels make of the narrator a problem with regards to the reader's trust of his or her account of the story, we can understand reliability as a narrative strategy. Reliability is a question of distance between the narrator and the story told, and it is a matter of narrative authority. When the narrator's account seems to be significantly different than the story as it happened in the fictional reality, the reader is encouraged to question that account. Similarly, when the novel as a whole invites the reader to trust the narrator by bestowing that character-narrator—since it is certainly very difficult, if not impossible, to be effective with a third-person non-personalized narrator who is unreliable—with narrative authority in the telling of the story, the reader or the audience is called upon to trust the narrator; however, when the character-narrator is not provided with the requisite amount of narrative authority that would inspire complete trust, his or her telling is signaled to be flawed.

There are multiple ways to erode narrative authority, including the aforementioned ones of underscoring difficulties in the access to knowledge, or a focus on the inexpressibility of language; but there are more effective ways to regulate that conferral on the part of the text as a whole. In this sense, as we have seen, the existence of contrastive narrative voices is fundamental. Both in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* the frame narrators function to signal Marlow's and (mainly)

Shreve's flaws respectively. In Conrad's novel, the frame narrator tells four chapters which contain episodes in Jim's life that allow its audience see an eventual duplicity in Jim which Marlow's telling does not make that apparent. The episode of the cutter, or the frame narrator's remarks on how Jim evaded some of his duties, as well as the way the frame narrator portrays the pilgrims in relation to Marlow's account of them, cannot be neglected. If this is the way the frame narrator suggests skepticism by contrast in *Lord Jim*; *Absalom, Absalom!* utilizes a similar device to point out Shreve and Quentin's unreliability in speech that is mainly Shreve's. Indeed, this narrative instance observes that the narrators have no experience of what they are talking about and thus cannot understand sections of the story, and directly comments on their flaws, and their condoning so as to be able to "overpass" in order to conduct the plot. This instance is even ready to assert their inventions. Impersonal frame narrators have a privileged position in the narrative as they are intended to be taken as main authorities both for their external connection with the story—which is made explicit by their placement on the most external narrative level of the novel—and by the fact that there is not a defined subject behind their voice to help the reader perceive a lack of authority—although these narrators are still ambiguous in both novels, contributing to the ambiguous narration of the texts as a whole.

Nevertheless, other character-narrators can also contribute to signal narrative unreliability. In this sense, the many episodic narrative voices that appear in *Lord Jim* function as warnings, but they are not as erosive of narrative authority as they are in *Absalom, Absalom!* because they are located within Marlow's telling, on a closer narrative level to the story, and therefore their deployment is utterly dependent on Marlow's convenience. By contrast, Faulkner goes further in his exploration of the device of juxtaposing multiple narrative voices on the same narrative level with the intention of eroding narrative authority and therefore intensifying the effects of subjective fallible voices. Needless to say, this exploration is shared with the multiple experimentation of narrative voice in relation to relativism in the Modern and the modernist novel.

The counterpointing of narrative voices allows *Absalom, Absalom!* not only to introduce several characters in the story, but also to elaborate the nuances of narrative reliability. These nuances are possible only under the condition, established at the very beginning of the novel and

pursued afterwards, that the story that is being told had in actuality happened (in the fictional realm, needless is to say) and that therefore it has historical grounds, or certain historical truth. This historical ground (Thomas Sutpen comes to Jefferson in 1833, and his story was witnessed by “the town” and occurred in historical time—the novel’s historical time) supplies the objective of truth that the narrators are pursuing: they mainly want the story to be retold as the last survivors are able to explain it (Rosa), or they want to know the true reason why Henry killed Bon. This pursuit of the truth in the story is also a feature of *Lord Jim*. In fact, without the objective of truth there is no secret, and no narrative enigma. It is precisely for this reason that the issue of reliability is a main device in the novels: because it discusses the problematic objective of truth by introducing the inflexion of the slippery idea of truth and of its complicated conformity to reality. Within this framework of problems at the core of the novel, it is comprehensible why Conrad, and especially Faulkner, develop the possibilities of narrative reliability. In light of that, a look at Faulkner’s sophisticated working of degrees of unreliability shall illuminate our difficulties with narrative concepts in these novels.

Returning to our last point, in *Absalom, Absalom!* the multiplicity of narrative voices allows us to elaborate a range of degrees of the narrators’ reliability. As explored before, there are narrators that have a clear limitation of knowledge and perspective but who do not attempt to deceive anyone in their telling, they just tell the story as they know it and only aim at telling it the best they can, as Rosa Coldfield and Quentin do. This does not mean that this type of narrator is unreliable; audiences tend to believe those stories without really making an issue out of them, just because they do not obscure the narrative. These have been labeled “fallible narrators.” Among them Phelan and Martin established several nuances around the “axis of facts/events,” the “axis of values/judgments,” and the “axis of knowledge/perception,” which referred to aspects of fallibility: “underreporting,” “underregarding,” and “underreading.” These narrators have been distinguished at the other end of the spectrum from what narratologists have named “unreliable narrators” or “untrustworthy” narrators, who are narrators that are clearly misleading in their stories, oftentimes for reasons that are apparent or simply present in the narrative. Further distinctions have been made within this concept such as Dorrit Cohn’s “discordant narration” or Phelan’s “bonding and estranging unreliability,” or Phelan and

Martin's distinctions between "misreporting," "misregarding," and "misreading." As we have seen, all these concepts have made the effects of narrative unreliability more visible and coherent. Many competent studies, most of them clearly supported by close readings of particular novels, demonstrate that neglecting the devices of reliability severely diminishes and misinterprets a number of important experiments undertaken in canonical novels throughout the twentieth century.

And yet, explorations in fiction are no less complex as a result. From my analysis, the manner in which Shreve is constructed as an unreliable narrator is clear: his very restricted access to information; his position in a second-person narrative situation; his selection of episodes in his constructing of the plot of Sutpen's story; his tampering with information known from closer witnesses of the story; his exaggerated and almost grotesque judging through connoted language; his disavowal of the truth of the story, and his inclination to verisimilitude; the frame narrator's remarks on his fantasizing; his very inventions of characters and episodes; and his overcoming of the inherent difficulties due to the fragmented information in which he dares to resolve what remains an enigma to the other characters—all of these portray him as a fully unreliable narrator. In the two novels, this is the only clearly unreliable narrator. In this, too, Faulkner innovates with regards to the scope and power of this round character-narrator. Nevertheless, this is the culmination of a process that Conrad before him had engaged in throughout his career.

As I hope to have convincingly argued, it is my contention that the explorations carried out by both authors in their working with the degrees of reliability do not fit the concepts developed by narrative theory so far. What is required are either new concepts or, rather, more flexibility in the discussion of this narrative technique. If the existing concepts have helped me to identify the problem and the device these authors are concerned with and have demonstrated fairly enough in the identification of the voices of Rosa Coldfield and Quentin, as well as that of Shreve McCannon; they have nevertheless failed in the description of Marlow and Mr Compson. The sharp contours of the concepts mean that these narrators do not fit properly anywhere, which reveals something that we already know when dealing with theory: there is no theory that can respond to the complexities of particular cases. These are examples of those cases.

I will make a few remarks on this narrative concept that shall illuminate further possible ways of studying this narrative technique. Let us first recall the problem again. From the textual analysis it is evident that both Marlow and Mr Compson begin an emphasized process of persuasion in their telling. Again, all narrators engage in persuasion in order to provide their narratives with conviction. However, we are interested in details here, and from our analysis we can see how there are several remarks in the narrative that not only insist on a process of persuasion being conducted in the storytelling, but which point out at a disturbing effect in the rendering of the story. Recalling Marlow's willingness to look for "a shadow of excuse" shall be sufficient here. This process of persuasion differs from the attitude of other fallible narrators in that these two particular narrators aim at providing a reading of the story that is directed towards a personal end. Marlow's persuasion tries to find a way to exonerate Jim, forgive his deed, and reclaim him for the community of "one of us." Mr Compson aims at finding an explanation that would fit the complicated enigma in the story, and justifies his account's casting of blame on bigamy as the reason why Henry killed Bon. Yet the novel underlines the fact that the story resists Mr Compson's attempts to fix it with his personal reading, since alternative readings are encouraged as well.

The process of persuasion in the narrative finds several narrative features that are shared by both novels. Both voices source to imagination when they do not have enough information. Marlow imagines Jim's emotions and thoughts, which invite both sympathy and forgiveness, as when he narrates the episode in the lifeboat; Mr Compson even dares to fill the gaps by speculating what might have happened in the precise moments when relevant information is missing, such as Henry and Bon's visit to the octoroon in New Orleans. Both are acutely aware of the effects on the listeners of emphatic interjections or expressions such as "He was immense" and "because what else could he...?," or "You see?"; both reveal their own prejudices in highly judgmental and connoted language, for instance when referring to women—Marlow to the black chief mate's wife and to Jewel, and Mr Compson to Miss Rosa or Judith.

However much these features recall the signals that indicate the presence of unreliable narrators, there is a common one that makes them unsuitable for that category: they both repeatedly return to the

essential gap which had prompted them to conjecture. Theirs is an attitude that sources to imagination and that is pressing to lead the audience towards a particular reading of a story, made possible by the gaps, or allowed by the existence of multiple directions. Nevertheless, they do not deny the lack of information, and neither do they renounce to the idea of truth—they simply take a step further toward speculation. Their telling makes constant reference to the fact that there is something missing that cannot be explained and that theirs is an effort to picture the possibilities behind the gaps, and therefore beyond their reach. They clearly differ from Shreve, who in his playing with storytelling proceeds not only by conjecturing but by assuming his own speculation as truth until the moment in which the story is resolved. Shreve is misleading; Marlow and Mr Compson persuade, yet they make explicit their attempts to convince. There is a difference, indeed, in these two novels. There is a modulation in these voices that our reference to either reliability or unreliability falls short of capturing and is even confusing. I have referred to the process of conviction through narrative conjecture which remains just that, and thus which does not pretend to know or does not invent in order to solve the narrative enigma, but which tries instead to guide towards a suggested reading, as the “process of narrative persuasion,” as a “voice of persuasion,” or simply as “persuasion.” It was not my intention to be confusing in the use of multiple names for the same process, rather I aimed at describing the nuances of these voices by allowing them to talk in order to show how subtly they manage to persuade the reader, and how warned that process is in the novel. To limit the concept in the manner that other concepts have been constrained with regards to unreliability would be another vain effort to impose fixity where I see subtlety and complexity; a clarity when there is a working of narrative ambiguity. In this sense, the concepts of “reliable,” “fallible,” and “unreliable” or/and “discordant narration” have proven useful and necessary for identifying the problem and detecting several narrative features upon which these narrators are built; but they are too limited to provide an explanation for a more complex working of narrative reliability.

Indeed, Conrad works with the subtleties of reliability in Marlow by engaging him in a process of narrative persuasion; and Faulkner further elaborates this concern in the creation of multiple character-narrators that allow portrayal of different ways of facing the problems of limited knowledge and perspective in storytelling: from a narrator

who has a very subjective and limited perspective (Rosa); to a narrator that, aware of the gaps, dares to imagine a reading of the story to persuade his audience (Mr Compson); a narrator that does resist the temptation to invent (Quentin); and finally, a narrator that brings persuasion directly to a convincing narrative constructed upon assumed invention, crossing into unreliability.

Furthermore, the limitations I have found in dealing with the aforementioned narrative concepts are due to the fact that narrative texts are studied from a strict formal point of view that does not sufficiently take into account the historical context in which the novels are produced, or that the novels discuss. This involves a shift in perspective that I am going to suggest as one of the most remarkable conclusions to the present dissertation.

In order to fully understand the choice of the problem of narrative reliability both in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* we need to understand it in relation to what Tynianov labeled “la vie sociale” or the social “series,” its appropriate historical context. It is in this light that we can apprehend why it is that Marlow aims at something particular that justifies our perspective of his voice as involved in a process of narrative persuasion; likewise, Shreve’s finding in miscegenation of a solution for the narrative enigma is not at all arbitrary, but immensely relevant for the story that all the narrators have been telling.

A halt to the representation of racial stereotypes shall provide us with a full comprehension of the last point, because the exploration of narrative reliability serves the purpose of creating an ambivalent response to the representation of ‘race’ in the novels. I have addressed the study of racial representation from a new perspective that has enabled me to make the transition from the historical context to fiction. As we have seen, racial stereotypes appear in the narrative in an apparent flat way, inextricable from a wider historical discourse that has racial distinctions at its core. The discourse of British imperialism at the turn of the century, like that of the New South Creed or the Southern myth, help to advance the reasons for a particular vision of racial relations that are, in fact, mainly social, economic, and political. It is crucial for the understanding of the appearance of racial stereotypes in the novels to inform them historically. Only when contrasted with the realities in which they made sense, can we identify

them and read them as properly as possible. Subsequently, I have attempted to understand their narrative functions in the novels, which help to delineate their relevance, their forms of appearance, and their meanings, illuminating the novels as a whole.

I have elaborated this process of analysis as a method to approach not only the relationship between culture and narrative, following the perspective adopted by many critics, but rather I have taken a step further that allows us to conceive stereotypes as narrative forms. This is essential to understanding the goals of this dissertation. Viewed as submitted to the structure and development of a narration, we can see the functioning and meaning of racial stereotypes within the fiction, as material transformed by the dictates of literature. It is from this point of view that we can see the full range of connections between the historical context and narrative strategies.

If we recall the representation of “race” as analyzed in chapters 3 and 5, we see that the notion of the stereotype plays a very effective part in the narratives of *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Certainly, in the context in which Conrad and Faulkner wrote, so intensely depicted in racial terms and so determined by certain repeated pictures which were used and reused (even abused) in the historical context by both popular culture and in contemporary political debates, it was not easy to move beyond those fixed images. Indeed, if racialism had accomplished with relative success the task of supporting and reinforcing the Empire’s growth, and justifying the costs and exertions needed to maintain it (Porter 24), it had likewise sustained the fiction of segregation as a necessary prerequisite for the maintenance of public, social, and political order in Jim Crow era America. Nevertheless, as Porter points out for Britain, and which can be applied to the U.S. South, “racial feeling prompted an over-ready imposition of authority, exposed too blatantly the force underlying Imperial relationships, and so tended to undermine Empire” (23). Henceforth, uncertainty about the understanding of racial theories and distinctions, as well as a confusion with regards to how to resolve the tensions arising from complex racial relations are fairly discernible in both authors. This is profoundly so in the case of William Faulkner, since criticism of segregation in the South, as well as the brave challenge to the long objectified images of African Americans as a basis for racial discrimination were strongly present in the United States in 1936. Similarly to a certain extent, Edward Said’s description

of Conrad's position on imperialism is still an eloquent evocation of the unstable circumstances in which Conrad found himself:

They [Kurtz and Marlow] (and of course Conrad) are ahead of their time in understanding that what they call "the darkness" has an autonomy of its own, and can reinvade and reclaim what imperialism had taken for *its* own. But Marlow and Kurtz are also creatures of their time and cannot take the next step, which would be to recognize that what they saw, disablingly and disparagingly, as a non-European "darkness" was in fact a non-European world *resisting* imperialism so as one day to regain sovereignty and independence, and not, as Conrad, reductively says, to reestablish the darkness. Conrad's tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism was essentially pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that "natives" could lead lives free from European domination. As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them.<sup>488</sup>

Also illuminating as direct testimony of the times, the texts in *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters*, as well as the interviews given over the years to several printed media and at the University of Virginia, and compiled in *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner 1926-1962* and *Faulkner in the University*, are full of ambiguities, of overwhelming and terrible situations, and tricky questions which Faulkner tried to sort out in order to convey the complexity of addressing racial issues in the South, while also performing through rhetoric the ambivalence that trapped many individuals who every day breathed the virulence of racial discourse and witnessed its devastating, violent effects.

Two anecdotes illustrate the ambivalent responses to both the discourse of imperialism and the discourse of race in Conrad and Faulkner. Although Conrad's depictions of people he believed were of other "races" comprised brutal attributions of savagery and grotesque descriptions of practices such as cannibalism, Conrad's uneasy relationship with imperialism and its racist underpinnings is discernible in his ultimately never pursued editorial project that would distance him from *Blackwoods'* imperialist discourse, along with Edward Garnett, Cunninghame Graham, and Robert Louis Stevenson.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994, 30.

<sup>489</sup> In regards to the magazine's subscription to the imperialist discourse, it is interesting here to cite another anecdote that shows how conscious the market is about this tendency. Stephen Donovan mentions that "But the *Pall Mall's*

Likewise, despite Faulkner's well-known opinion on the "go slow" strategy in the resolution of the conflict over segregation, and despite many of his extensively studied and discussed opinions over issues such as lynching, or the relations between blacks and whites in the U.S., many of which would easily qualify as 'racist' from our contemporary vantage point—although I hope to have clarified that Southern perceptions of racial relations were more complex than that—Faulkner certainly demonstrated his own confusion with gestures such as when he pledged nearly \$3,000 for the education of the Oxford African American James McGlowan, principal of a black high school whom Faulkner saw as one of the "leaders of their race in the crucial times ahead."<sup>490</sup> There is in both writers a tendency to subtleties, more nuanced as the years go by, but the contradictions and ambivalences are still present later in their careers.

There is nothing unusual in the adoption on the part of both authors of racial stereotypes in their fiction, nor in their distress with regards to the enforcement of racial distinctions and to the contradictions between those fixed codes and the reality of their experiences: Where were those perfect white English gentlemen who, because of their natural condition, did not fail? Where were those clear racial lines that, albeit without allowing for the distinction between a mulatto and a white person, did in fact demarcate the boundaries of discrimination?

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transitional identity at the moment at which it serialized "Typhoon" offers a more cogent explanation. After gathering a distinguished contributor list in 1893-4 that included Thomas Hardy, Paul Verlaine and George Meredith, the magazine had become overly reliant upon popular 'names' such as H. Rider Haggard, Ouida and Grant Allen, prompting George R. Halkett, who joined the staff as editor in 1901, to set himself the task of recruiting writers on the cult of fame—Jack London, Ford Madox Ford, John Masefield and Conrad—whose contributors would need to display a greater degree of hybridity than their intermediate predecessors, that is to say, would need to expand the horizons of the short story in ways that appealed to the magazine's highbrow readers but that did not alienate its general audience by deviating from the codes of genre fiction." (*Joseph Conrad and Popular Culture* 178). The ambivalence towards a better fiction that would not entirely need to reject the imperialist project, albeit its aspirations to distance a little from it, is clear here.

<sup>490</sup> Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*. One-Volume Edition. 1974. New York: Random House, 1984, 535. Blotner also mentions how in 1951 he also spoke against the death sentence for a black man accused of having raped a white woman because "it had not been proved that force and violence had been used" (539). Although these examples of confusion come from a moment in which Faulkner's racial views seem to have evolved to a more comprehensive understanding of the urgency and injustice of the segregation system, they are clear anecdotes that reflect an ambivalence or confusion that had already been present in his fiction.

Not only did experience suggest that racial categories did not match the complex reality and relations between people, but racial discourse itself presented so many contradictions that any reflection that suspended belief could perceive its fallacious underpinnings. All these contradictions are imprinted on the authors' use of racial stereotypes in the novels, as well as in their submission to the potent principles of narrative such as, above all, narrative voice.

In order to properly behold these meticulous narrative artifices, we shall recall how the stereotypes work in the novels. Here Bhabha's concept of the stereotype as a dynamic dual structure built upon the opposition of two images both of which support the definition of the Other by contrasting it to the definition of oneself, is essential. This has helped us to see that to talk about the English gentleman is to talk about the colonized, and that to look at African Americans or blackness is to talk about Whites and about whiteness. All efforts to define oneself are dependant on the efforts to differentiate oneself from the Other. Bhabha's concept involves a dynamics of circulation by which the process of subjectivation needs to be seen as a whole, as a movement to define oneself and the other simultaneously. This means that, even though only one projection of this dual structure mentioned, its counterpart needs to be implied in order to understand its function in discourse. Finally, Bhabha refers to the flexibility of the stereotype. The stereotype presents various forms that can be contradictive, but that need to exist together in order to fit every situation and to be able to guarantee the endurance of the discourse they serve. In this sense, the proper identification of stereotypes has been crucial to dismantling equivocal perceptions of the representation of race in both novels.

In *Lord Jim* no attention had been paid hitherto to the stereotype of the English gentleman, because it is scarcely invoked explicitly, but rather indicated by allusion to many of the highly codified features that defined him, as we have seen. The debates over the behavior and the characteristics of the "Anglo-Saxon gentleman" were so insistently brought up in public schools and in the Adventure novels and travel writings—but also in the domestic fiction of Thackeray, Dickens, or Trollope—that there was no need for Conrad, not to mention Marlow, to cite the stereotype. It could be merely implied to signal the problem behind Jim's appearance. *Lord Jim's* questioning of the stereotype of the English gentleman appears as contemporary when

we relate Marlow's discussion over this figure to the metropolitan debates in the critical last two decades of the nineteenth century, which were generated by scandals such as the exploitative enterprises in Africa after the Berlin Conference, and the Boer Wars.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* Charles Bon needs to be seen as embodying the stereotype of the mulatto character, and more specifically the free light-skinned bourgeois mulatto of New Orleans. The centrality of this figure in the novel responds to the longstanding problem of miscegenation in the history of the South from the period of slavery and until the 1930s. As I have argued, both the contradiction that this very figure represented in a society that based an entire system of segregation on the notion of a biracial society, and the paranoiac fear of "passing," and the future engendering of miscegenated offspring at the core of the white community, was seen as the greatest threat to Southern society. These are the most relevant examples of the many other stereotypes and racial codes I have already identified in relation to their context in the novels, yet they are sufficient to illustrate the risk represented by the failure to seriously take into account historical circumstances.

The discussion of the historical issues involved in the presented stereotypes has prepared the ground for the analysis of their use in the narrative texts. This analysis has established a way to understand racial stereotypes as narrative forms. I would like to reemphasize an idea already discussed in depth: the stereotype provides a form that is filled with content as well as being a narrative device. Indeed, stereotypes are fossilizations of features and ideas that have a historical referent, but that in the process of codification have abstracted and simplified the multilayered historical realities. By being fixed in the stereotypes, the original referents are circumscribed through a translation into a semantic code that might be visual or linguistic. As a cultural artifact, the stereotype is ingrained in the historical realities defined in time and space; they are participants in the "worldliness," they are operative in the realities that produce and keep them alive. They are so ingrained that when present in other orders of reality such as literature they are immediately identified in the contexts where these artifacts are operative. Furthermore, they function even beyond the images that are encoded, since the audience in the community can fully unfold the elisions in the narrative. Just as an example, the very mention of Haiti carried the allusion to the latent spirit of revolution and violence

inherent in any slaveholding society, as well as a justification of the 'peculiar institution.'

On the other hand, the stereotype is twofold because it is a genuine narrative device, as Toni Morrison reminds us: "This allows the writer a quick and easy image without the responsibility of specificity, accuracy, or even narratively useful description" (*Playing* 67). Furthermore, the stereotype condenses a whole set of meanings in a single image that allows the writer to advance the narrative with the benefit of the implied meanings that are left to the reader's participation by adding the relevant information to the story. This only works when the stereotypes are familiar to a wide readership, and clearly enough presented in the narrative.

Notwithstanding, my contribution to this notion is that we need to see how racial stereotypes work within a fictional narrative. And thus I call for a shift that compels us to understand racial stereotypes as narrative forms in the novel. Indeed, not all writers use racial stereotypes arbitrarily in their fictions. In the work of talented writers such as Conrad and Faulkner this is not definitely so. Therein racial stereotypes are submitted to the same principles of narrative as any other cultural issues. Moreover, the work of fiction benefits narratively from its codified content. They are presented linguistically in a certain way and accomplish specific functions so as to contribute to the construction of the plot, to the telling of the story. The analyses of *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* demonstrate that this shift in perspective is not only possible but also highly recommended if we wish to understand how the representation of 'race' works in literature.

The racial stereotypes vary in *Lord Jim* depending on what their function is in the narration. As we have seen, the stereotype of the English gentleman—which is white by definition—is unfolded at length during the whole section of the *Patna* through the indication of stereotypical features of this figure, but cut short by the greater or lesser degree to which they are present in Jim. Therefore, youth, height, courage, or masculinity are either not enough or too much. In this way, the somewhat ill fitting presentation of the stereotype in Marlow's first narrative is sufficient to indicate a critical perspective that will change in the second part of the novel, and that reinforces and explains the disturbing jump from the *Patna* and the abandonment

of 800 pilgrims on board. To restore the dignity inherent in the image of the English gentleman, and in accordance with Marlow's persuasive effort to exonerate Jim and bring him back—at least in the outside world's memory of him—to his original community as “one of us,” the presentation of the stereotypes of the Malays, the half-castes, and the Pilgrims necessarily differs from the nuanced exploration of the stereotype of the gentleman. Indeed, the aforementioned stereotypes appear condensed in the Patusan section and are presented in flat opposition to the figure of Jim. In their plainly racist presentation, which is in turn framed by Marlow's explicit telling of an Adventure story, the stereotypes of the Malays and half-castes function to restore the dignity of the white colonizer, in fact to redefine the sharp dichotomy of colonizer and colonized, of the gentlemen and the uncivilized. In the accomplishment of this general function, the stereotype of the half-caste may function as a threat, as an intermediate stage, and as a personification of tragedy, in accordance with the functions that are regularly attributed to this figure in literature; meanwhile, the Malay embody the already known stereotypes of the noble savage, and the Other as ‘beast’ or ‘wild savage.’ These functions contribute to the development of the plot, as well as to the questioning of Marlow as a fully trustworthy storyteller.

It is likewise possible to analyze racial stereotypes in *Absalom, Absalom!* from the same perspective. As it has been demonstrated, the presentation of the stereotypes has a crucial function in the advancement of the plot and in the unfolding of the racial character of the enigma. The stereotypes of the slaves, and the references to Haiti foreshadow not only the importance of “race” in the story of Thomas Sutpen, but specifically the issue of miscegenation and the merging of “races” which look the same while constructed as different. Their exposition contributes to anticipate a racial mystery that the plot does not disclose until the end of the novel, thus preparing the reader to understand and accept the enigma as a racial mystery. All the issues at stake in the debates around the mulattoes and the problem of miscegenation are present in one form or another in the stereotype of the former, or in the codified arguments about the latter. Their appearance in the narrative in the form of characters who actually are, or are supposed to be, mulattoes first, and later in the form of the codified arguments of the Southern Myth on the subject of miscegenation, is clearly foreshadowed by the descriptions of scenes that portray merging and revolt through the stereotype of the slaves,

and the complex stereotype of the mulatto in the characters of the octoroon, Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, and Clytie. The function of threat embodied by Charles Bon is reinforced by the proleptic gestures performed by the reference to Sutpen's bestial slaves and the invocation of the Haitian Revolution. All these stereotypes support the construction of Charles Bon as a light mulatto character who might aim at "passing," and who in turn condenses the whole debate on miscegenation, that is to say the debate on segregation/integration. The activation in Charles Bon of the stereotype of the bourgeois mulatto works in a very similar way in terms of duration, allusion and centrality to that of the English gentleman in *Lord Jim*.

While the contribution to the advancement of the plot runs parallel in these two works, *Absalom, Absalom!* introduces the flexibility of the stereotype described by Bhabha in a more effective way than Conrad does. Indeed, we find in the portrait of the Malay the image of the noble savage and that of the nasty sultan combined, but we hardly find a combination of stereotypes that simultaneously suggest different readings. Jewel can be thought of as a tragic character, as a bridge between the colonizers and the colonized, and as a menace if we take into account her suspicions about Jim. This is probably the only stereotype constructed upon a blending of contradictive forms. It is not surprising, however, in light of the representation of mulattoes in literature, that the stereotype of the half-caste is one of the most complex ones in racial discourse. Nevertheless, Faulkner uses much more effectively the coexistence of multiple contradictive forms of the stereotypes. Indeed, *Absalom, Absalom!* combines multiple forms of a single stereotype condensed in a single character or one episode in a way that they suggest that the fiction could be read from different and contradictory points of view. We have seen outstanding examples of the creation of this ambivalence in the presentation of Charles Bon as both a tragic mulatto and the greatest threat to the Sutpen's family, as both the victim of a society founded upon labor and racial discrimination, and its principal menace. Likewise, Clytie is a very ambivalent character whose conjunction of stereotypes makes her appear as both a slave and a free mulatto who deserves a better place in the family. Her deed of burning Sutpen's Hundred also allows for contradictive readings. The issue of miscegenation appears in itself contradictive, since there are episodes in which touch functions as a clear challenge to the separation of races, and towards the end there is the equally contrastive idea that miscegenation is the phenomenon

that leads to the degeneration of the races and the destruction of the plantation family—the destruction of the South by extension. In this manner, the presentation of the multiplicity of forms invites us to see what Bhabha calls the “circularity” of the stereotype, its inherent ambivalence. The tentative nature of racial discourse in adjusting to a complex reality through the codification of contradictory images suggests that reality is far more complex than the abstract codes which try to condense it.

If Conrad makes use of the problem of a character whose reality does not suit properly the stereotype of the English gentleman, and thus emphasizes the problematic correspondence between history and racial discourse; Faulkner introduces the complexity of people and situations by combining several forms of the stereotype within a single character or episode. He thus manages to expose the fragility of racial discourse from within the very level of discourse. Furthermore, both Conrad and Faulkner source to the assumption of the very broadest discourse of their times—which includes racial discourse—to criticize the lack of actual adjustment between racial discourse and historical circumstance. *Lord Jim* assumes the discourse of the Adventure novel in the second part of the work to “naturalize” the appearance of the stereotypes, and to reinforce the specific commonality to which the narrative is addressed. But that flat assumption of the discourse provides a contrast to the rejection of that framework in the section of the *Patna*, creating the effect of a partial disavowal of the adoption of the Adventure novel, marked by Marlow’s returning to the initial doubt of a restored English gentleman, at the end of the novel. On the other hand, Faulkner assumes the Southern myth as a framework for the novel from beginning to end, in a way that in fact there is no story “outside the Southern Myth.” The challenge to the simplification and fixity of the racial stereotypes that are contained in this discourse comes from the presentation of the complexities of reality by a disrupting combination of the several forms in which the stereotypes are coined. Thus, *Absalom, Absalom!* presents a series of dynamic stereotypes in flux, in contrast to their usual flatness. The stereotype becomes as unstable as it really is when observed from a distanced, general perspective, and it conforms to the great ambivalence without which it cannot function or endure. In this sense, both authors find their ways to make the texts acknowledge the fact that racial discourse itself contains the seed of its destruction: Conrad by emphasizing the contradictions between stereotype and historical reality; Faulkner by

portraying the contradictory forms of the stereotypes. These achievements are the direct product of the use of the stereotypes as narrative forms.

However, strictly in terms of the development of the plot other considerations complicate the representation of “race.” As different as the racial representation in these two novels might be, we identify a similar working of racial stereotypes in terms of their uses in the narrative. In both novels they move the plot forward, and contribute to unveil the racial basis implied or directly—though belatedly—disclosed in the narrative enigma, as we have seen. This leads us to further difficulties. The use described above in the disposal of the stereotypes to challenge the simplification and fallacies of racial discourse works in the opposite direction when taking into account the unfolding of the narrative. Indeed, the narrative moves towards the racialization of the enigma, and of the story by extension: when observed in their narrative development and functions in the novels, in their interaction with other stereotypes as presented in the narrative, the centrality of racial issues becomes self-evident. In *Lord Jim* this effect is created through the concentration of the racial stereotypes in the last section of the novel: the conflict with Jim has only a faintly suggested racial basis in the first part of the novel, which increasingly grows in importance in the second part in a way that, by the end, the only way to restore Jim’s dignity is through a racial reading. *Absalom, Absalom!*’s growing presence of racial stereotypes and their function of foreshadowing, gradually unfold the relevance of the racial issues as the novel approaches the narrative enigma, and even later, when there is a bold attempt to resolve it precisely upon a single racial basis, the novel closes with Shreve’s final racial prophecy, which Quentin however ambiguously refuses to admit. As complex as the presentation of the racial issues has been through the narratives, both novels steadily lead the discussion back to the reductive dichotomist view embraced by the Adventure novel and the Southern myth. At the end, the novels assume clear distinctions: white colonizers-Malay colonized; white Americans and African Americans. Both novels, therefore, enforce an evident racialization of the narrative enigma that leads to the virtual assumption of the flattest racial stereotypes. Moreover, this endorsing can only be seen as ambivalent when the novels are considered as a whole, in the effects of their exposition of a more complex perspective of racial issues and their challenging of the stereotypes they, nevertheless, assume.

Rich as the use of racial stereotypes is in *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, it is still more so when viewed in its interaction with narrative voice. Since the novels relate these two aspects of the narrative differently, I shall take a look at them separately. *Lord Jim* moves firmly towards persuasion from the moment the frame narrator introduces Marlow. His initially detached attitude towards him gradually transforms into a sympathy that compels him to strive for, and ultimately find ways of exonerating this character in the rendering of his story. Skepticism gives way to exoneration as the novel moves on. At the same time the novel unfolds the importance of racial distinctions to the point of finally racializing the narrative enigma. The interaction between narrative voice and racial stereotypes is essential here since it is precisely Marlow who introduces the framework of the Adventure novel so as to be able to conclude his process of persuasion. This frame is of great help to Marlow in his conscientious attempts to convince the reader that, despite his irreparable mistake on the *Patna*, Jim's immense achievement in Patusan redeems him, in the sense that he finally appears much more suitable to fit the stereotype of the English gentleman which Marlow never renounces seeing in him. By bringing to his narrative the flattest stereotypes of the colonized read in racial terms, he manages to underscore Jim's whiteness, and to leave the questioned lines of separation between the "races" sharply traced again. He then portrays immobile figures that suit preconceived ideas of feeble-mindedness, servitude, and loyalty along with the stereotypes of the 'beasts' or the 'wild' savages, which help him to prove Jim's hidden courage. But the doubt over Jim is still like a cloud casting a shadow over his brilliance. Indeed, despite the factual demonstration reinforced by the racial stereotypes that Jim has achieved a victory, Marlow recalls the doubt at the end of the novel. This induces the reader by an analeptic gesture to revisit the initial discussions engendered by Marlow's initial skepticism. Revisits involve both a reconsideration of the development of Marlow's voice as one engaged in persuasion, as well as a racial perspective of the discussions of the "Anglo-Saxon gentleman." A reconsideration of the fixed code of conduct can be understood now in the framework of the discourse of colonization as rooted in racial beliefs. Meanwhile the narration finally manages to exonerate Jim through the racial perspective, Marlow's ultimate respect for the truth makes it impossible for him to attain absolute conviction, thus leaving the whole process of benevolent observation and judgment suspended, and the narrative enigma finally unresolved.

Therefore, in *Lord Jim* we see how the very racialization of the enigma as dependent on Marlow's narrative voice accomplishes the function of culminating the research for a "shadow of an excuse"; but paradoxically it is Marlow himself who helps his audience, both in the novel and outside of it, to uncover his partial reliability. The multiple signs that have pointed at Marlow as a highly persuasive voice throughout the novel are finally vindicated by Marlow's acknowledgment of the persistence of the doubt. Yet in the closure of *Lord Jim* the reader is confused about the real story of Jim: Marlow's doubt is now the reader's doubt about the persuasive account of Jim's story, and a persuasive perspective of "us" as a community: the torch has been passed along.

On the other hand, *Absalom, Absalom!* develops the narrative by combining degrees of reliability that range from the fallible subjective voice of Rosa Coldfield, to Mr Compson's deeply persuasive voice, pausing briefly to accommodate Quentin's concern for accuracy, and finally ending with Shreve's fully unreliable voice. We noted the paradoxical effect in *Absalom, Absalom!* that only imagination, and even a jump into fiction enables the narrators to approach a solution of the narrative enigma. This has brought us to consider unreliability as both a limitation with regards to the attainment of truth as well as an alternative—sometimes even the sole way—of reaching it. Indeed, if we disregard Shreve's narrative unreliability by considering fiction as a genuine way of telling an otherwise enigmatic story, we find that the unfolding of the story parallels the illumination of the racial center of the novel. As it moves forward, the racial issues are progressively seen as the most relevant, while the familiar conflicts keep steadily moving to the background. To the first-time reader, the narrative voice parallels this movement, since it is true that Mr Compson, Quentin and Shreve gradually add more information that seems to indicate the reasons for the murder: the existence of the octoroon with a child; the idea that Bon is Sutpen's son; and the fact that Charles Bon has a black ancestor. Thus, the enigma seems to be progressively approached.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the novel's texture is far more complex, as Duncan Aswell observed: "That fact remains that as we read through the book for the first time, desperately looking for 'answers,' we feel that we keep getting nearer and nearer the truth. But this feeling actually depends upon the emotional convictions of the

successive narrators, not on any objectively verifiable information.”<sup>491</sup> The only way to advance is to follow these assumptions. Notwithstanding, when we analyze the narrative voices and we take into consideration the novel’s insistence upon a historical basis (the novel’s fictional history), we see how as the novel advances the narrative enigma is less clear, since it is being approached chiefly through conjecture. Once we consider Mr Compson a highly persuasive voice and Shreve McCannon an unreliable voice, we see how the process is the reverse to what we had perceived at the beginning. As the novel moves further from fact, the narrative enigma is obscured.

Therefore, there is an opposite movement in the unfolding of racial representation and the narrative voice in the novel. By way of foreshadowing, the mirror images, and the presentation of the multiple forms of the stereotypes, it becomes obvious that the central issue is miscegenation. Meanwhile, Shreve’s last turn of the screw as an unreliable narrator casts a doubt over his interpretation that Bon is black. The narrative voice leaves it less clear that race is the reason why Henry killed Bon. Through foreshadowing and the presentation of a range of stereotypes about African Americans, we are encouraged to agree with his assertion, but as a result of the aforementioned signs of narrative unreliability, we are discouraged to trust even race as the reason for the murder.

This movement between clarification and obscurity in racial representation is dependent on the narrative voice: the most direct attribution to miscegenation as the central conflict depends on Shreve because he assumes it to be the solution to the enigma, and he develops Charles Bon in accordance with this pattern. Shreve is clearly unreliable. Nonetheless, miscegenation cannot be fully discarded as a plausible explanation for the enigma, since the other narrators’ accounts activate the racial stereotypes and allow them to function as a nourishing undercurrent of the story. The ever-present proleptic function of the racial stereotypes would encourage the reader to subscribe to Shreve’s assumptions. But ultimately there is only ambivalence left and a profound distress that bequeaths a heart in conflict to the reader.

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<sup>491</sup> Duncan Aswell, “The Puzzling Design of *Absalom, Absalom!*” *Kenyon Review* 30.1 (1968): 75.

In spite of their differences, in both novels there is a strong connection between narrative voice and racial representation. As character-narrators are in charge of storytelling—with the exception of the frame narrator in the first four chapters of *Lord Jim*—the narrative use of racial stereotypes is mainly dependant on these narrators, and therefore subject to their prejudices, their adherence to or detachment from the British imperialist discourse, or the Southern myth, and their skills and aims in storytelling. The novel's use of the stereotypes is much more exclusively dependant on Marlow in *Lord Jim*; while in *Absalom, Absalom!* it is shared by the narrators. In the latter novel, Rosa Coldfield is responsible for the representation of Sutpen's slaves and Clytie, Mr Compson of the slaves, Clytie, the octoroon, Charles Etienne and to a lesser extent of Bon; Quentin is in charge of Haiti and the slaves at Tidewater, as well as Clytie and the poor whites; Shreve is responsible for the construction of Bon as a "nigger" and for adopting miscegenation both as the solution to the narrative enigma and as the reason for Sutpen's downfall. In Faulkner's novel the emergence of racial issues in the narrative is much more gradual, and the connections between the stereotypes stronger. The force with which the issue of miscegenation arises depends also on its relative disassociation from a single narrative voice (foreshadowing and mirror images). However, the dependence upon Shreve's narrative voice of the mulatto character of Bon, and of the very debate and conclusions on miscegenation are at the heart of the narrative structure of the novel: the most important revelations derive from his invention. In this sense the interrelation between narrative voice and racial representation is more intricate. In both cases, however, the novel's concern with reliability determines the ambivalence with regards to racial representation in the novel. The novels leave to the reader the decision of what stand to take in relation to the narrative persuasion or narrative unreliability and, consequently, in relation to the representation of "race." What is certain is that they function in such an intertwined way that reading them separately undermines and neglects the effects of their powerful combination.

If, as Hillis Miller suggests "[t]his weaving movement of advance and retreat constitutes and sustains the meaning of the text, that evasive center which is everywhere and nowhere in the play of its language" (*Fiction* 39), we can view this characteristic dynamic of the possibilities of interpretation as configuring the ambivalent texture of both narrative voice and racial representation in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Lord*

*Jim*, in a similar way that other novels, such as *Light in August*, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* or *Heart of Darkness*, do so, not to mention other more distant narratives such as Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno*, Alejo Carpentier's *El Reino de este mundo*, Louis-Ferdinand Céline's *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, or J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*. It is this movement incapable of sustaining a single direction that shapes the movement of a struggle, of a tension produced by two opposite forces. What is uncertain for the subject is uncertain for the narrative. Conrad and Faulkner lived through controversial historical moments in which the discourses of race pervaded the minds of the individuals, who were expected to share the values of the commonality. However, the unsuitability of the languages of racial distinction in relation to the realities they refer, and the contradictions inherent in the discourses themselves erode the social authority of ideological corpuses and contribute to the confusion and the social tension that arise from the contradictions. Conrad and Faulkner bring to their fictions the historical crises already documented from the ambivalent perspective from which they regarded them. So they resorted to innovation in narrative technique to create ambivalence in the perspective of the subject, specifically exploring the issue of narrative reliability. It is precisely this narrative ambivalence what could bespeak an ambivalent representation of racial issues in literature, as we have seen.

The layers that comprise the struggle, both in the narrative aspects as well as in the cultural and human motifs, are innumerable. They range from the very specific rhetorical figures, such as the oxymoron, to the wider structure of the narrative and finally the broadest cultural forces in conflict.<sup>492</sup> Certainly, as Stanton De Voren suggests for *Lord Jim*

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<sup>492</sup> See especially Faulkner's contemporary critic, Walter J. Slatoff, who affirmed as long ago as 1957 that "Like Faulkner's writing in general, the oxymoron involves sharp polarity, extreme tension, a high degree of conceptual and stylistic antithesis, and the simultaneous suggestion of disparate or opposed elements. Moreover, the figure tends to hold these elements in suspension rather than to fuse them. Both terms of an oxymoron are in a sense true," and further "The passage suggests not only the complex and enigmatic qualities of life, but the sense of life as conflict, tension, and frustration, which persistently informs Faulkner's presentation. . . . The simultaneous 'cant' and 'must' suggests a desperately divided and tormented perspective and condition of mind which tries to move simultaneously and intensely toward both order and chaos, and which understandably seizes upon the figure which most clearly moves in both directions, the oxymoron." ("The Edge of Order: the Pattern of Faulkner's Rhetoric." *Twentieth Century Literature* 3.3, October 1957, 109, 123.)

the reader and all judgment are suspended, hovering delicately between a colossal wrath of forces. The novel is a novel of conflict and contradiction, or impossibility of judgment, the attempt and the repression, the failure and the recognition—each conflict is every other conflict, separate, but analogous; in other words, tension exists on all planes: in the being of Jim of Marlow, of the auditor and the reader. It is a presentation of unresolved dichotomies on the levels of action, of judgment of action, and of the judgement of the telling of the judgment of action, levels which are moral, psychological, metaphysical, and aesthetic. The action is directed exclusively to perplexity.<sup>493</sup>

On the most general level of the structure of *Lord Jim* and *Absalom, Absalom!* we find the more specific narrative tensions, already described, which affect the shaping of both narrative voice and racial representation: those between narrative authority and dispossession thereof; between fact and fiction; between knowledge and belief; between credibility and unreliability; between the distanced voice and the subjective voice; between language as an instrument of communication and an instrument of fallacy; between orality and writing; between the hidden message meant to be deciphered and its unfathomability; between racial stereotypes and the nuances of reality; between the contradictory forms of the stereotypes. Both aspects of these forces in tension are needed in order to grasp the complexities of a world in transition, aesthetically and historically.

In this elaboration of narrative tension through the axis of cultural beliefs, experience, and language we find a space that lies between the historical and the ahistorical. The stories narrated stand in that moment of tension or instability that is both absolute and independent of historical truth as aesthetical finished words, and historically grounded. In this space, stories are constructed upon facts and are told in a language that is fully dependant on the historical context that shapes it, and that makes possible the disclosure of the implied meanings. This space, however, cannot fully rely on a truth that is unattainable and virtually even absurd in the realms of fiction, and must alternatively construct a world out of imagination, sourcing to creative language. This space is the space in between what is personal or subjective and what is detached or objective, what is fiction and

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<sup>493</sup> Stanton De Voren, *Comedy and Form in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad*. Hoffman, The Hague: Mouton, 1969, 81.

what is history.<sup>494</sup> In the space of fiction, creation transforms the social content and makes it appear as what it simultaneously is and is not. What is for certain is that it relies on knowledge, imagination, as well as language as the true means of producing stories. And thus, reading fiction is reading history as transformed in fiction, as well as reading history is reading fiction as used in history.

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<sup>494</sup> I want to quote here Gerhard's Hoffmann's words, because he has a close perspective to the one I am developing here, yet more rooted in postmodernism and the insistence of an existing yet different Truth: "In fact *Absalom, Absalom!* makes history a playing-field for the imagination, and the relationship between truth and imagination is not finally settled. The imagination alone is able to summon the past and its truth—but only as fiction." ("*Absalom, Absalom!*: A Postmodernist Approach." *Faulkner's discourse* 278)





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