



**UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE  
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**Transition of the Old South and Its Effects  
on the Families of William Faulkner's  
“Yoknapatawpha County”**

**THESIS**

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**Proměna amerického Jihu a její dopad na  
rodiny Faulknerova yoknapatawphského  
kraje**

**DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE**

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## **Abstract**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the transition of the American Old South into the New South was accompanied by immense social and political changes. However, it gave rise to the myth of the antebellum South, reminiscing the times gone and idealizing the plantation tradition. This myth inspired, among others, William Faulkner, who in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County projected its influence on the families that he populated the county with.

After introducing Southern literature and the circumstances of the transition of the Old South, this thesis deals with three chosen Yoknapatawpha families: the Sartorises, the Compsons and the Sutpens. The purpose of this paper is to analyze Faulkner's view of the influence of the transition of the Old South on the family histories, and to identify the author's attitude towards it and towards Southern history in general.

## **Souhrn**

V druhé polovině devatenáctého století byla proměna amerického starého Jihu doprovázena obrovskými společenskými a kulturními změnami. Zároveň ale díky této proměně vznikl mýtus předválečného Jihu, nostalgicky připomínající časy dávno minulé a idealizující plantážnickou tradici. Tento mýtus inspiroval, mimo jiné, Williama Faulknera, který ve svém fiktivním yoknapawphském kraji promítl jeho vliv na rodiny, kterými tento kraj osídlil.

Po úvodu, zabývajícím se jižanskou literaturou a okolnostmi proměny starého Jihu, se tato diplomová práce věnuje rozboru tří vybraných yoknapatawphských rodin: Sartorisů, Compsonů a Sutpenů. Cílem této práce je analyzovat Faulknerův pohled na vliv proměny starého Jihu na historii rodin a určit autorovo stanovisko vůči této proměně a obecně vůči jižanské historii.



## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Literature of the American South.....	3
2.1. Overview .....	3
2.2. William Faulkner of Yoknapatawpha .....	9
3. Transition of the Old South.....	16
4. The Effect of the Transition on the Families of Yoknapatawpha.....	21
4.1. The Sartoris Family .....	21
4.2. The Compson Family .....	30
4.3. The Sutpen Family .....	41
5. Conclusion.....	52
6. Resumé.....	55
7. Bibliography.....	60
Appendices.....	64

## **1. Introduction**

The American South has been a region of many faces. From the time when the first ship landed in what would become Virginia to the time of the Civil War and into the present day, the South has been many things: a frontier, a colony, a region, a nation, and the concept of the South as a cultural and sociological entity has existed in many forms as well.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the South went through a complex transformation that followed the Civil War. It took away the old principles on which Southern society was built, but, on the other hand, it strengthened the self-awareness of the Southerners. They started to reminisce about the times before the war, gradually forming the image of the Old South before the war into an idealized myth. Narrations and stories about the Old South flourished, inspiring many literary authors, among them also the greatest writer of Southern literature, William Faulkner. The aim of this paper is to examine Faulkner's view of the influence of the transition on his characters. To accomplish that, three families of Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County were chosen and their history and fate of the individual members were analyzed.

The first chapter of this thesis provides an outline of Southern literature, briefly characterizing its development from the very beginnings to the Southern Renaissance movement in the twentieth century. A special focus is on the local color fiction, which, for the first time, reflected in literature the nostalgia for the antebellum South. Besides the reasons for its emergence, the characteristics and authors of local color are mentioned, too. The second section of the first chapter is

devoted to William Faulkner. The influences of growing up in a Southern family and surroundings on his work are depicted, pointing out the importance of Faulkner's grandfather as a model for the Sartoris family paterfamilias, John Sartoris. In addition, the connection between Faulkner's friend, Sherwood Anderson, and the circumstances of creating the famous Yoknapatawpha County is implied, followed by a brief description of the county and the modernistic style that Faulkner commonly used for depicting his characters and their past.

The next chapter focuses firstly on the causes of the Civil War, touching upon the thorny issue of slavery in the Old South and comparing it with the typical idealized view. The aftermath of the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction is dealt with further on, pointing out the dramatic changes that the transformation of the Old South brought about.

Finally, in the main part of this thesis, the topics from the previous two chapters intermingle and, on three Yoknapatawpha families, the Sartorises, the Compsons and the Sutpens, Faulkner's view of the impact of the transition of the Old South is analyzed. The results of the analysis are then dealt with in Conclusion.

## 2. Literature of the American South

### 2.1. Overview

Beyond the porch the salvia bed lay in an unbearable glare of white light, in clamorous splashes. Beyond it the drive shimmered with heat until, arched over with locust and oak, it descended in a cool green tunnel to the gates and the sultry ribbon of the highroad. Beyond the road fields spread away shimmering, broken here and there by motionless clumps of wood, on to the hills dissolving bluely in the July haze. (*Sartoris* 202-203)

What is described in the citation is one of the typical literary images of the American South. These include not only the scenery of the state of Mississippi, with long, dusty roads weaving through the dry land, and the fabulous Mississippi river running down to Louisiana's mysterious swamps. They portray also the rolling mountains and valleys of Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia, the Florida's sultry subtropics and much more<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless, it was not only the South's mythical landscape that has provided rich inspiration for the imaginations of some of America's most distinguished authors. They constituted their images also on the people living in the South – farmers, slaves, plantation masters and their ladies, shopkeepers and others, who all, according to Shelby Foote, have been great story-tellers: "I've never known Southerners do anything but tell stories" (Foote, qtd. in Rubin et al. 60). Thus, writers combined these oral traditions – the political rhetoric, preaching, conversational wordplay, and lazy-day storytelling – and the diverse topography of the South and converted them into remarkable artistic literary images.

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete list of the Southern states see Appendix I

Charles Joyner asserts that Southern story-telling existed long before the transatlantic migration of Europeans and Africans to the New World. The Cherokees, the Creeks, the Choctaws, and other Native American groups told stories of origins – of how the Great Sun, the earth, the clans, corn, bears, and fire came to be (477). Beginning in the sixteenth century, the Spanish became the first to import European folktales into the South. Planting colonies in what is now South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana, and exploring from Texas to California, the Spanish left a strong cultural imprint on these areas. Joyner further declares that, following the Spanish, French settlers in South Carolina and especially in Louisiana brought zestful versions of such Gallic narratives. Moreover, Europeans were not the only transatlantic settlers of the South:

From Senegal and Gambia, from Guinea and Angola came shiploads of enslaved African men, women, and children. They brought with them shared traditions of storytelling and a host of animal trickster tales. (Joyner 477)

As a result, when all these cultures and societies intermingled in the South, the folk narrative traditions of all Southerners – Native Americans, Euro-Americans, and Afro-Americans – were combined and modified by one another and created solid fundamentals for the future literature of the American South.

One could argue that literature in the American South began as early as 1608 when the explorer and adventurer Captain John Smith published his promotional pamphlet *A True Relation of Occurrences and Accidents in Virginia*. Or, to move ahead a hundred years, perhaps Southern letters began with the secret diaries, character sketches, poems, and satiric prose of the true Renaissance gentleman in residence at Westover, William Byrd II. But because America

as an independent nation did not exist until 1776 and neither Smith nor Byrd considered himself other than a British citizen, the most one can say is that they established the traditions of exaggeration, irony, wit, stylistic versatility, and experimentation with form that would characterize Southern literature (*Beginnings*).

Later on, during the revolutionary period, lawyer, architect, educator, scientist, philosopher, governor of Virginia, secretary of state, vice president, and president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, served as the intellectual center of a burst of rational and enlightened thought about the American political state, the foundations of society, and the nature of man. Although he wrote only one full length book, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), it was through his composition of the text of the *Declaration of Independence* (1776) that Jefferson had a lasting and profound impact on history of the political, social, and cultural life of the South and the nation (*Beginnings*).

Political and economic leadership in the South by the end of the eighteenth century had moved from Virginia to South Carolina, especially Charleston, when it became clear that raw cotton was to be that state's and the region's essential product and that slavery was therefore necessary to the future:

For the first 50 years the southernmost outpost of the British empire in America, Charleston became a major commercial center and supported the development of a wealthy merchant and planter class, which in turn encouraged a lively cultural life including one of two newspapers published in the South, a library society, and bookstores. (*Antebellum Era*)

In one of the bookstores, members of the so-called "Charleston School" gathered. The most influential member

of the group, and probably in his time the best-known Southern writer, was William Gilmore Simms, editor of 10 periodicals and author of over 80 volumes of history, poetry, criticism, biography, drama, essays, stories, and novels. He was one of the first to make a profession of writing. Simms' only serious rival as a writer in the South was Baltimore politician John Pendleton Kennedy, whose informal fictional sketches in *Swallow Barn* (1832) helped establish the plantation tradition novel, which in its depiction of a mythic genteel past and an ideal social structure has found hundreds of imitators in American romance fiction.

The only writer of the antebellum South who was to rise to a level of national and international prominence was Edgar Allan Poe. Although he was raised in Richmond, attended the University of Virginia, and edited the *Southern Literary Messenger*, he turned away from regional materials for the most part in his poetry, fiction, and criticism to devote himself to a form of literary expression that aspired to universality in style and structure (*Antebellum Era*).

In 1861, the most influential event of Southern history, the Civil War (or, the War between the States, as the Confederate military men used to call it), came and its consequences changed the South forever:

The outcome of the Civil War signified the victory of nationalism over regional interests. With the increasing move toward urbanization and industrialization following the war and the concurrent diminishing of regional differences, it is not surprising that there was a developing nostalgia for remaining regional differences.  
(Rowe)

Thus, the new local color, or regional, literature emerged, focusing on the characters, dialect, customs, topography,

and other features particular to a specific region. Anne Rowe notes that although the terms regionalism and local color are sometimes used interchangeably, regionalism generally has broader connotations. Whereas local color is often applied to a specific literary mode that flourished in the late nineteenth century, regionalism implies a recognition from the colonial period to the present of differences among specific areas of the country. Additionally, regionalism refers to an intellectual movement encompassing regional consciousness beginning in the 1930s.

The primary subject matter of local color movement became peculiarities of speech, quaint local customs, distinctive modes of thought, and stories about human nature. Donna Campbell in *Regionalism* provides typical characteristics for a local color story: its common setting was frequently remote and inaccessible, surrounded by nature, and the characters were marked by their adherence to the old ways, by dialect and by particular personality traits central to the region. The narrator, serving as mediator between the rural folk of the tale and the urban audience to whom the tale was directed, was typically an educated observer from the world beyond, who learnt something enlightening from the characters. The plot was usually simple, included lots of storytelling and revolved around the community and its rituals, while the theme displayed an antipathy to change and a certain degree of nostalgia for an always-past golden age.

The beginning of the local color movement is usually dated "from the first publication in the *Overland Monthly* in 1868 of Bret Harte's stories of California mining camps" (Rowe). Since then, many sketches and short stories about simpler times and faraway places appeared in magazines, and



several local color novels started to be published, too. Many writers joined the movement, for example George Washington Cable, Kate Chopin, Thomas Nelson Page, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Orne Jewett, Joel Chandler Harris, Mary Wilkins Freeman and many others. The most prominent local colorist, however, was Samuel Langhorne Clemens, or Mark Twain, who introduced the local color fiction to the whole world. His masterwork, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), was:

the most incisive satire ever written of Southern attitudes, customs, and mores, aside from its central importance as a pivotal work of American literature. In Clemens, frontier humor was brought to a high level of literary artistry and through Clemens was transmitted to the majority of subsequent practicing humorists. (*Antebellum Era*)

Southern local color flourished until the 1890s, after which this genteel mode of writing lost popularity. Nonetheless, Rowe continues, the interest in regionalism was again revived in 1930s, when several Southern writers, among them the "New Critics" John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren, started a Southern intellectual movement by publishing the manifesto called *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. They argued "that the South, having held on to its agrarian culture longer than the rest of the country, could serve as a model for a society in which man rather than the machine was dominant" (Rowe). Together with the intellectual movement, there was a corresponding literary movement known as the Southern Renaissance, which, although not always parallel to the intellectual movement in its philosophic principles, also emphasized the importance of regional setting and tradition to individuals' lives. In other words, Southern Renaissance writers, often employing modernistic means of

expression, sought through the exploration of specific characters and places answers to the questions of life and death that concern all people. Rowe notes that among the most notable writers of that period were William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Thomas Wolfe, and, in the decades that followed, such writers as Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, Eudora Welty and Walker Percy, have continued to place characters and action in the South, too.

## **2.2. William Faulkner of Yoknapatawpha**

Of the Southern regionalists, it was unquestionably William Cuthbert Faulkner who gained the most esteem. Since his receiving the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950, "his reputation has continued to grow steadily and [...] there are many critics who now think of him as his country's greatest modern writer" (Lee 226).

Born a native Mississippian in a branched family that had been prominent in the area for three generations, he grew up in the shadow of the family's formidable history, which, as Donald Kartiganer asserts, set the stage for Faulkner's conflict between the need to remember and honor the past and the need to create for himself a distinctive identity (890). Faulkner was also a very attentive listener, as Kartiganer suggests:

at his father's livery stable or the family's hunting cabin [...] [he was] listening to the tales of the old times and people. He could hear stories of the Civil War from men who had fought in it [...] as well as from those whose words were their only weapons: the old aunts, 'the women, the indomitable, the undefeated, who never surrendered [...]'. (Kartiganer 890)

Josef Škvorecký supports that by stating that all these cousins, uncles and aunts were "proud Southerners, storytellers of tales and stories [...]: they all enriched

William Faulkner's talent" (Škvorecký 172, my translation<sup>2</sup>).

The most influential figure from Faulkner's family was his great-grandfather, Colonel William Clark Falkner. His life was "as eventful as a romantic movie" (Škvorecký 171, my translation<sup>3</sup>): during his life he became a successful lawyer, planter, soldier, politician, railroad builder, novelist and poet. After the Civil War, contrary to the fate of other Southern aristocrats, his property and social status did not collapse when slaves were freed, instead he became even more successful by building a railroad that connected Ripley, Mississippi and Middelton, Tennessee. However, Colonel Falkner later became enemies with his former business partner in this enterprise, Richard J. Thurmond, who eventually shot Colonel dead in 1889. Kartiganer makes an important point when suggesting that Colonel Falkner's extravagant life and career "seemed to impose on all his heirs [...] a sense of their inevitable decline." An example of that can be Faulkner's father, Murry, who:

failed in his ambition to take over the railroad of which his father was president, and who settled down in a position as secretary and business manager [...] in 1919 only after some fifteen years of drifting from one job to another. (Kartiganer 890)

The stories of his family members and the picture of a declining Southern family then reflected in many Faulkner's works, the author using them as a device to examine human perception of the influence of the past on the present.

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<sup>2</sup> hrdí Jižané, vypravěči zkazek a příběhů [...]: všichni přispěli svým vkladem do vínku Williama Faulknera

<sup>3</sup> pestrý jako romantický film

When Faulkner began writing, in his teenage years, he was strongly drawn to the earlier nineteenth century poets, especially Shelly and Keats, under whose influence he wrote his first collection of poems, *The Marble Faun* (Simpson 238). In addition, after seeking a way to explore the relation of self, history and art in a society divested of sacramental in his first two novels, *Soldier's Pay* and *Mosquitoes* (Simpson 244), Faulkner was much influenced by the advice of Sherwood Anderson, with whom he became friends in New Orleans in 1925:

I learned [...] from [Anderson] [...] that, to be a writer, one has first got to be what he is, what he was born; [...] 'You have to have somewhere to start from: then you begin to learn,' he told me. 'It dont matter where it was, just so you remember it and aint ashamed of it. Because one place to start from is just as important as any other. You're a country boy; all you know is that little patch up there in Mississippi where you started from. But that's all right too. It's America too; pull it out, as little and unknown as it is, and the whole thing will collapse, like when you prize a brick out of a wall.' (Faulkner, qtd. in Simpson, 244-245)

Faulkner understood Anderson's advice precisely. According to Škvorecký, "Faulkner, originally a poet, saturated by family and county mythology, he felt the need to depict the inexpressible: not just more or less excellently describe the events and actions, but also to give a form to the dark music behind life" (177, my translation<sup>4</sup>). He took Anderson's advice, "gave up trying to imitate contemporaries or writers of recent past" (Hoffman 119) and

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<sup>4</sup> Faulkner, původem básník, nasáklý rodovou a krajevou mytologií, měl právě potřebu zachytit nevyjádřitelné: ne prostě více nebo méně bravurně popsat sled událostí i činy lidí, ale dát tvar temné hudbě za životem

situated his next novel, *Sartoris*, in a fictional northern Mississippi county named Yoknapatawpha. Although it is a fictional place inhabited by fictional persons, Faulkner integrates it into a geographical setting that includes prominent actual places: it lies in north central Mississippi, 70 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee (Aiken 572)<sup>5</sup>. Faulkner thought of Yoknapatawpha as having the same geographical position as the real Lafayette County, Mississippi, and the geography of the fictional place is based heavily on the geography of that county. Charles Aiken further illustrates the similarities on the fact that, like Lafayette, Yoknapatawpha County is drained in the north by the Tallahatchie River and in the south by the Yoknapatawpha, the fictional name of the Yocona River. Also Jefferson, the political seat of Yoknapatawpha County, resembles in many ways Oxford, the political seat of Lafayette County, where Faulkner spent the most of his life (572). However, Aiken believes that despite similarities between Yoknapatawpha County and Lafayette County, many differences exist, too, as Faulkner created Yoknapatawpha by combining the real, the modified, and the imaginary. The geography of Lafayette County and Oxford were changed, locations were shifted, place names were changed and reality was blended with fabrication. In addition to Lafayette County, Faulkner also drew from Marshall, Tippah, and Panola counties, Mississippi, in creating Yoknapatawpha (572). Aiken summarizes that in developing his model for Yoknapatawpha County, Faulkner intended it:

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<sup>5</sup> For Faulkner's hand-drawn map of Yoknapatawpha see Appendix II

neither as Lafayette County thinly disguised nor, at the other extreme, as the entire South in microcosm. Rather he viewed it as a place that, though located in the South, was one in which he could describe the universal experience of humankind. (572).

Faulkner populated Yoknapatawpha County with a number of families, whose members and their histories serve as the main theme of his works. He did not have to invent much, because he had "living models, as well as experience in hearing about his family and the families of others in Oxford" (Hoffman 119), and so he could create believable characters. Frederick Hoffman also considers it interesting that "almost all of the persons on whom Faulkner depends for major positions in the later novels come from pioneer families who become 'aristocratic' leaders of the community" (120). However, Hoffman asserts that, in histories of all of these families recorded in the Yoknapatawpha saga, there is almost always a sense of erosion, which reflects Faulkner's growing up in a declining Southern aristocratic family. The most typical example are the Sartorises, who "seem to come closest to resembling the family and the descendants of Colonel William Cuthbert [*sic*] Falkner, [even though] Faulkner does not permit anyone autobiographical license" (Hoffman 120). Other prominent aristocratic Yoknapatawpha families are, for instance, the Sutpens, Compsons, Benbows, McCallums, Snopeses and McCaslin-Edmonds. Faulkner brilliantly treats all these inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha both "horizontally" and "vertically": he gives a view in breadth of the disposition of his world at any one given time; but his maneuvering of time, one of his most distinguished contributions to modern fiction, causes his characters to

remain "alive" at all times, whether in actuality or in memory (Hoffman 123).

In order to successfully accomplish such a complex manipulation of characters, Faulkner realized that he needed to utilize a complex means of expression, such as stream-of-consciousness. A great illustration of that is, for instance, the opening sentence from *Absalom, Absalom!* :

From a little after two o'clock until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that - a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler, and which (as the sun shone fuller and fuller on that side of the house) became latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes which Quentin thought as of being flecks of the dead old dried paint itself blown inward from the scaling blinds as wind might have blown them. (7)

Faulkner's approach is one of indirection, of inexplicitness: Kartiganer analyzes the sentence as a sentence that presses forward even as it turns back, refining, supplementing, digressing. He believes that there is a violence in it, to expectations of what words and sentences do as well as to rules of syntax and customs of clarity. One virtually loses the main clause - "they sat" - in the welter of where and how long. Readers must read the sentence twice to realize that at its core is a "room" - the place where "they sat" - a room once buried and freshly brought forth in the details of what it has been called and why it is so dim and hot and airless (887). It fully supports what Faulkner initially had in mind; in one of his lectures he admitted that he wanted:

'to say it all [...] between one cap and one period, [...] to put everything into one sentence – not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present, second by second.' (Faulkner, qtd. in Kartiganer, 887)

Foote is enthralled by this tremendous complexity of Faulkner, he considers it "the very heart of [Faulkner's] greatness". It impels readers to read his novels again, because "as you read, especially reread [...], it opens up whole avenues of approach to that book, whole ways of looking at it, none of which invalidate the other ways" (155). Foote further suggests that "the advice 'read it again' doesn't apply to anything more than it does to Faulkner's work - 'read it again' always gets you more." Michael Millgate confirms that, pointing out that Faulkner's basic method depends upon each work being read as a whole: "Each individual episode, character, chapter has its meaning and function in terms of the whole and must be seen in relation to, in reverberation with, all the other episodes, characters, chapters" (*Faulkner and History* 30).

To sum up the rumination on Faulkner's unique linkage of remarkable style and theme, Škvorecký believes that Faulkner in his works achieved "the perfect unity of content and form", that he created "a piece of work, in which [he] succeeded in comparing to the powers that created this world, because such piece of work is a world in itself, as immense as that one around us" (169, my translation<sup>6</sup>).

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<sup>6</sup> dokonalá jednota obsahu a formy; v praxi to může znamenat dílo, v němž se autorovi podařilo připodobnit se silám, které stvořily svět, protože je samo světem, stejně nesmírným jako ten kolem nás.



### 3. Transition of the Old South

According to the *Southern literature* article on *Wikipedia*, the American South as a distinct culture began to come into existence in the early 1800s when cotton cultivation started to take hold. The demand for cotton significantly increased when the American Revolution cut off supplies of European cloth, but the real expansion of production came with the rising demand for raw cotton from the British textile industry. Thus, more and more labor was needed on cotton plantations and in other areas, too. Since the economic and social structure of the Old South still heavily depended on slavery, expanded enslavement of African Americans took place, even though the importation of slaves into the United States was banned in 1808. African Americans were enslaved on small farms, large plantations, in cities and towns, inside homes, out in the fields, and in industry and transportation. Though slavery had such a wide variety of faces, the underlying concepts were always the same. Slaves were considered property, and they were property because they were black. Their status as property was enforced by violence – actual or threatened.

Although by some critics assert that the Old South was "one of the most unpleasant and hellish societies ever invented by man" (Calvert), it has become largely romanticized as an idealized pre-industrial highly-structured genteel and stable agrarian society, in contrast to the anxiety and struggle of modern life. In literature, this romanticized view corresponds to the term "plantation tradition", which applies to works that:

look back nostalgically to the times before the Civil War, [to the] time when an idealized, well-ordered agrarian world and its people held certain values in common, among them chivalry toward women, courage, integrity, and honorable

conduct among gentlemen, and pride in and loyalty toward one's region. Works in this tradition employed the metaphor of a plantation "family" with white and African-American members, all of whom felt deep bonds of loyalty to one another, with the white master as the head of this patriarchal system. In keeping with its hierarchical ideals, stories of this tradition frequently portrayed African Americans as happier and better off under slavery than they would be (or, later, were) if they were free. (Campbell, *Plantation Tradition*)

Wherever the truth lay, with the slave plantation system in the South and wage-labor industrial capitalism in the North, the two regions had developed two starkly different societies. Divergent economic, political, and cultural outlooks gradually fed sectional tensions. Eventually, sectional differences surrounding the issues of taxation, tariffs, slavery, and states' rights led to the secession of eleven Southern states from the Union after Abraham Lincoln's victory in the presidential election in 1860. The Southern states that seceded formed the Confederate States of America, elected their own president, Jefferson Davis, and created the Confederate Army to protect their interests. Even though there is "no escaping the racial dimension of a war fought by a slave society", Charles Wilson believes that "the Confederacy [also] aimed at preserving a traditional life that seemed threatened by outside intervention" (*Old South* 588). It represented a conservative political revolution aimed at preventing social and economic changes in its fundamental institutions.

The American Civil War broke out with the first shots fired at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina in April 1861. Between that date and general Lee's surrender of his Confederate Army to general Grant at the village of

Appomattox Court House in Virginia in April 1865, the Old South was radically changed forever. The only war fought on American soil by Americans left more than 600,000 dead and:

Southern cities in ruins, railroad lines ripped from the ground, plantations burned, factories and mills gutted. [...] Visitors were struck by the absence of fences – burned as firewood by raiding Yankees or trampled by Confederates searching for food. Other signs of human construction – bridges, trestles, even roads – were destroyed, creating an eerie sense of stillness and emptiness. (Melosi 320)

Besides destroyed landscape, property and enormous human losses, another drastic change affected the South during the Civil War. With the Emancipation Proclamation put in effect in 1863, the situation of rural labor in the post-war South experienced radical changes. Though plantations survived, they operated on a different scale. With all slaves freed, their labor supply was disrupted, as they had to employ wage workers or sharecroppers (Clark 6). Thus, many plantation owners went bankrupt and the economical situation in the South worsened. Concerning the question of slavery, although at the end of the war Southern Whites had accepted the end of slavery, the thought of black social and political equality was unacceptable to them. As a result, Southern Whites united in the 1870s in resisting northern-imposed radical change designed to end White supremacy (Wilson, *Reconstruction* 659).

Namely, from 1865 to 1877, in the Reconstruction era, national efforts were concentrated on incorporating the South back into the Union. The period involved important constitutional and political issues, but, from the viewpoint of cultural history, Reconstruction's underlying significance was its effort to remake Southern culture (Wilson, *Reconstruction* 658). Wilson asserts that some

northerners approached this in a spirit of vengeance, seeking to punish Southerners for the war; others had political motives for wanting to reduce Southern influence and insure Republican party dominate and patronage for themselves; still others were idealistic reformers hoping to aid freedmen adjust to their new status. Peyton McCrary analyzes the Reconstruction's mythic cast of characters more closely, describing the "carpetbaggers," whom Southern Whites portrayed as greedy interlopers exploiting the South; the "scalawags," who were traitorous native Southern Whites collaborating with the Yankees; the freedmen, who were sometimes seen as violent and depraved in the myth but mostly seemed ignorant and lost; and the former Confederates, who were all honorable, decent people with the South's best interests in mind (1120).

For a decade after 1867, the carpetbaggers, scalawags, and freedmen ran the governments of the Southern states, looting their financial resources, passing high taxes and denying whites a role in government (Wilson, *Reconstruction*, 658). As a result, Southern Democrats were willing to use any means necessary to end Republican control of their states, including political violence. Initially through secret organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and later more openly, as with Wade Hampton's "Red Shirts" in South Carolina, the Democrats resorted to beatings, assassinations, and armed bands of horsemen at the polls to "redeem" the South from "Negro rule" (McCrary 1120). Eventually, the Compromise of 1877, an informal, extralegal arrangement between Southern Democrats and northern Republicans, brought the removal of federal troops from the South and the official end of Reconstruction.

Wilson believes that this transition of the Old South into the New South had a positive legacy, as new state

constitutions were written, reforms in judicial systems accomplished, operation of county governments changed, and education was advanced (*Reconstruction* 659). However, according to the *Reconstruction* article on *Wikipedia*, the end of Reconstruction also marked the demise of most civil, political, and economic rights and opportunities for African Americans. In exchange for its acceptance of reintegration into the Union, the South was allowed to reestablish a segregated race-discriminatory society, with elite Southern legislators given extraordinary power, lasting into the mid-twentieth century.

Although the Reconstruction did not come out as expected, it surely helped to preserve the self-conscious Southern identity. Wilson points out that, after the Civil War, Southerners worked hard to preserve the memory of their regional historical experience. The sense of history was given a tangible meaning through memorial celebrations, the erection of monuments, and the expansion of historical societies. Paintings of Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis were hung in schoolrooms across the region (*Old South* 589). In addition, folk ballads, poems, and storytelling by the old passed on to the young the region's memory of the Civil War and the Old South; to sum up, the myth of the Old South was being created. Such idealization of the plantation world received its most influential expression in the 1880s and after in stories of local colorists like Thomas Nelson Page, Kate Chopin and others. Half a century later, it was revived by the authors of the Southern Renaissance literary movement, and for William Faulkner, the most prominent of them, the Old South, its transition and the past in general, were the main themes that he projected into his works.

#### **4. The Effect of the Transition on the Families of Yoknapatawpha**

The impact of the Civil War on the South was immense. As was suggested above, for many people it meant a giant leap from aristocratic status into desperation and poverty. The Reconstruction period, together with introducing its future to the South, also turned the minds of Southerners back to the times before the Civil War, creating the myth of the Old South. William Faulkner must have been told many stories about the Old South by his kin and by others in Lafayette County, which provided him with much inspiration. However, Millgate suggests, he did not want to just retell the stories, as he was "less concerned with history as a factual record than with the past, especially the past as viewed from the standpoint of the present" (*Faulkner and History* 38).

In order to discover Faulkner's attitude towards the past and his view of the influence of the transition of the Old South on the family histories, three Yoknapatawpha families most bound with history of the antebellum South were chosen and thoroughly analyzed.

##### **4.1. The Sartoris Family**

Among the family names in Yoknapatawpha County, some are more prominent and more famous than others, shrouded in myth and legend and having acquired a higher respect. One of them are the Sartorises, who John Padgett regards as "an old, and one of the most ubiquitous, family names in Yoknapatawpha County". It is because members of this family not only play principal roles in *The Unvanquished* and *Sartoris*, but they appear as background characters in many other Faulkner's major works and short stories, and affect the life of the community by their deeds and achievements.

Before examining the family history and its connection to history of the Old South and discussing how its transformation is reflected in it, an important fact needs to be mentioned about the novels. The Sartoris family was first introduced in *Sartoris*, published in 1929 (in 1973 an unabridged edition came out as *Flags in the Dust*). Although Faulkner had already written two major works before, in this book he, for the first time, ventured into drawing inspiration from places he was most familiar with: Lafayette County, Mississippi and its capital Oxford, Faulkner's adopted hometown. Based on these locations, he created a unique invention of his own that was to become an inseparable background and foundation for nearly all of the works that he was to write. He took the readers to:

the concrete reality of the town of Jefferson, seventy-five miles from Memphis, a town in upland country, lying in tilted slopes against the unbroken blue of the hills, in the midst of good broad fields richly somnolent. (Hoffman 45)

Together with the town of Jefferson, he presented his readers with its surroundings and with the country it was located in, Yocona, which became later well-known as Yoknapatawpha County. There, with the Sartoris family already established<sup>7</sup>, 'old' Bayard Sartoris struggles to keep the family business inherited from his father, while his grandson 'young' Bayard, feeling guilty for the death of his twin brother John in the First World War, seeks refuge in compulsive acts of physical courage. Another prominent member of the family, Miss Virginia Du Pre, Colonel John Sartoris' sister who came to live with them in 1869, runs their household, outliving all the Sartoris men

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<sup>7</sup> For the Sartoris family tree see Appendix III

except for her great-great-grandnephew Benbow Sartoris. "Miss" or "Aunt" Jenny, as she is often called, belongs to the indomitable and strong-willed female characters that represent an imagined ideal for women, brave and resourceful rather than helpless and soft, an inspiration for which provided the aunts and cousins of Faulkner's branched family.

With Sartoris and other Yoknapatawpha characters and their histories started, Faulkner had a background to build on and could finally start to write with a clear purpose, aware of what he wanted to say. He discovered that, being in the very heart of the former Old South, the whole myth lay just in front of him, ready for him to draw it out and use in his works. The author himself later admitted in one of his interviews that it was *Sartoris* that marked the beginning of his most productive period:

Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and by sublimating the actual into apocryphal I would have complete liberty to use whatever talent I might have to its absolute top. It opened up a gold mine of other peoples, so I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too. [...] I like to think of the world I created as being a kind of keystone in the Universe; that, as small as that keystone is, if it were ever taken away, the universe itself would collapse. My last book will be the *Doomsday Book*, the *Golden Book*, of Yoknapatawpha County. Then I shall break the pencil and I'll have to stop. (Faulkner, qtd. in Millgate, *Faulkner and South* 208)

Faulkner's exultation and justified pride in achieved purpose radiates from every line of the statement. No wonder, as by writing *Sartoris* he has just set the scene for a number of other first-rate Yoknapatawpha novels that,



eventually, made an inestimable contribution to the American literature.

Written nine years after *Sartoris* and being actually its prequel, Faulkner continued with unfolding the Sartoris family history in *The Unvanquished*. Originally a series of short stories that appeared in *Saturday Evening Post* in 1936, they were later published unified in 1938. Hoffman observes that the stories are actually so much bound together that "not a novel, it nevertheless holds a line of consistent relevance to a group of representative people; it is more, therefore, than a mere 'collection' of short stories" (82). The group of people that Hoffman mentions are again the members of the Southern aristocratic, slave-holding Sartoris family, only this time the book deals mainly with its earlier generation. Readers are finally introduced to the legendary paterfamilias Colonel John Sartoris, traveling across the nation to fight for the Confederacy in battles like Vicksburg and Shiloh, his mother-in-law Rosa Millard, a rigidly moral character, but also a brilliantly cunning heroine of the book, her grandson Bayard (the old Bayard in *Sartoris*) who, through his adventures described in the book, grows to maturity, and their other relatives, companions and adversaries, too.

Since its action occurs historically earlier than in any other of the books, with its setting situated deep in the past of Yoknapatawpha County, *The Unvanquished* is a good starting point for examining the family history in the County and its relevance to history of the Old South. It begins around 1837, with John Sartoris' arriving in Jefferson, building a large plantation and commencing his great career as a famous Southern aristocrat. The ideal of plantation perfection that he pursues is also a part of the dream of the Old South, which is what both history of the

Old South and history of Yoknapatawpha County have in common. Louis Rubin notes that:

this has historically been one of the charms of the plantation image in our literature: the ideal of ordered, leisured, settled life, free of striving and the pursuit of the almighty dollar, with time for relaxation and enjoyment of one's days. (187-188)

In the statement, Rubin deliberately chooses flowery language to describe the idealized lifestyle of Southern aristocrats, thus pointing out the contrast with the fast-moving times that followed after the Civil War.

With his plantation up and running, John Sartoris' aim is to secure the continuation of the family line and he marries a daughter of Rosa Millard, with whom he fathers two daughters and one son, Bayard. Unfortunately, his wife dies soon after their birth, and at the time of the Civil War, in 1861, John Sartoris and Thomas Sutpen raise the first regiment of Confederate soldiers in the county and go to Virginia to fight. Soon, the Colonel's name becomes well-known all around the Mississippi; in *The Unvanquished*, Bayard learns about his father's fame when he meets Uncle Buck in town. Upon Bayard asking him if he has heard of his father, Uncle Buck exclaims:

'Who ain't heard about him in this country? Get the Yankees to tell you about him sometime. By Godfrey, he raised the first damn regiment in Mississippi out of his own pocket, and took 'em to Ferginny and whipped Yankees right and left with 'em [...]!' (58)

Colonel John Sartoris earns his fame because he personifies many qualities attributed to the gentlemen living in the Old South: gallantry, intelligence, courage, honor, integrity, devotion to family, proud masculinity. For instance, he exhibits great bravery and shrewdness when he, provoked to a horse race against his friend Zeb, scooting

on his horse a lot ahead of his marching regiment and of his competitor, too, suddenly finds himself alone on the top of a rise. Below it, a company of enemy Yankee cavalry is eating dinner. One of the soldiers in Colonel Sartoris' regiment later recounts the brave deed that Colonel had the courage to do on his own, pretending that he was not alone and that his regiment was right there surrounding the enemy:

'Cunnel says they [Yankees] was a-settin' thar gapin' at the rise when he come over hit, holdin' cups of cawfee and hunks of bread in their hands and their muskets stacked about fo'ty foot away, buggin' their eyes at him. It was too late fer him to turn back, anyhow, but I don't reckon he would have ef they'd been time. He jest spurred down the ridge and rid amongst 'em, scatterin' cook-fires and guns and men, shoutin', 'Surround 'em, boys! Ef you move, you air dead men.' One or two of 'em made to break away, but Cunnel drewed his pistols and let 'em off, and they come back and scrouged in amongst the others, and thar they set, still a-holdin' their dinner, when Zeb come up. And that was the way we found 'em when we got thar ten minutes later.' (Sartoris 187)

A year after his leaving for the war, John Sartoris returns to Mississippi where he raises a unit of Partisan Rangers and joins the cavalry of General Nathan Bedford Forrest. His subsequent success in raids even causes the Union Army to put a price on his head. After the end of the Civil War, Sartoris grows in stature as a politician and businessman, building a railroad and when that is completed, he runs for the state Legislature, defeating his former business partner, B.J. Redmond. Redmond, however, in a final act of desperation stemming from years of rivalry, decides to kill him. Though Sartoris is aware of Redmond's intentions, he chooses to meet his fate unarmed, telling his son in *The Unvanquished*: "I am tired of killing men, no matter what the necessity nor the end. Tomorrow, when I go

to town and meet Ben Redmond, I shall be unarmed" (266). True to his suspicions, Sartoris is shot and killed by Redmond in 1876.

Adam Sofen in his analysis of *The Unvanquished* observes that most of these actions of John Sartoris is seen through a narration by an adult Bayard at a time long after the war, when the mundane realities of his father's memory have been supplanted by a mythology he has partially invented, his character is more legitimately clouded in an aura of legend. If Colonel Sartoris were the narrator or the protagonist, his larger-than-life qualities would overpower the book and make it cartoonish; through the eyes of his son and in small doses, his presence gives the war majesty and grandeur. A great example is Ringo and Bayard's waiting for Colonel Sartoris' return to the plantation. When he is finally approaching, Bayard observes him with respect:

Then we could see him good. I mean, Father. He was not big; it was just the things he did, that we knew he was doing, had been doing in Virginia and Tennessee, that made him seem big to us. [...] He came toward the steps and began to mount, the sabre heavy and flat at his side. Then I began to smell it again [...] - that odor in his clothes and beard and flesh too which I believed was the smell of powder and glory [...].  
(*The Unvanquished* 10-11)

Although readers encounter Colonel Sartoris only infrequently throughout the novels, it seems that he is always there, anyway. For instance, in the opening chapter of *Sartoris* (and in the following chapters sometimes too) he is present, being described and behaving as a regular character, even talking to others, even though at that time he was long dead. The characters feel the sensation "of [his] living presence in the room, summoned up by the intensity of feeling that the colonel's life and death had

aroused" (Cantwell, xvi). Faulkner thus brilliantly treats the myth and legend of the Old South, inseparably incorporating his main hero into it. At the same time, the hero becomes a legend himself.

When examining history of the Sartoris family together with history of the Old South, both of them have the top of their glory in the time until the Civil War started. Faulkner clearly considers the Civil War a breaking-point: after the defeat of the Confederate Army, the Reconstruction and transition of the Old South eventually brought a decline to the Sartoris. The leisured, settled life Rubin talks about was replaced by the hectic 'pursuit of the almighty dollar' of the New South. The Civil War also changes the very epitome of the old virtues, the ideal man of the traditional system, Colonel John Sartoris himself. Namely, when an ex-slave is to be elected Marshal of Jefferson and two carpetbaggers from Missouri come to Yoknapatawpha County to organize the black population for the Republican Party, John Sartoris uses even lethal force to prevent that. He goes to the hotel where the election takes place, shoots the two carpetbaggers and takes out the ballot box, saying: "'This election will be held out at my home'" (*The Unvanquished* 238), indicating clearly that this time it will be only for white people. He is so desperately refusing the change of conditions that he is able to do everything to avert it, throwing all his virtues away. Another example of how the Civil War changed the nature of people is when Rosa Millard eventually goes to her death, because she still believes in something that is no longer valid. When Bayard and Ringo beg her not to go to Grumby, the leader of a local plundering gang, to requisition his horses, she answers them with absolute sureness: "Southern men would not hurt a

woman. [...] I am a woman. Even Yankees do not harm old women" (*The Unvanquished* 171-174). They later find her dead body on the floor of the compress where she was supposed to meet Grumby.

The family history in the Reconstruction period and afterwards is dealt with in *Sartoris*, when the family is afflicted by another war, this time the First World War. Until that, during the Reconstruction period the family business quite prospered, but the new demerits brought with the transition of the Old South were already to take place, an example of which serves the B. J. Redmond's envy of John Sartoris' political successes and the subsequent willful homicide. Even though John's son Bayard takes the family business over from him, it gradually decomposes; (now) old Bayard becomes deaf, his sons Bayard and John go to the war, where John loses his life, and the young Bayard, after returning back home, is drowning in his feelings of guiltiness. His wife and child dead, he is indirectly responsible also for the death of his father by driving him too fast in his automobile, which caused him a fatal heart attack. Young Bayard eventually "goes to his death in a gesture of aberrant heroism" (Hoffman 47) as he undergoes a suicidal mission, a trial flight of an experimental plane that crashes with him dying in its wreckage.

Thus, the Sartoris family is brought to its final decline. Since being still too much concerned with the past, bewildered and weakened by moral and intellectual confusions, it is unable to cope with the ambience of the transforming South. The Old South they were still living in has ceased to exist, it has become only a legend and the same happened by young Bayard's final act also with the whole Sartoris family:

They too, like the Civil War, have existed through several generations of time, and have acquired a legend. Both legends converge upon the lonely, present figure of the young Bayard. He is a forlorn and unhappy – though an angry – testimony of the collapse of legends. (Hoffman 47)

To sum up, history of the Sartorises and history of the Old South were quite analogous. Splendidly flourishing without any hindrance until the Civil War, it meant a turning point for both of them. What followed was the transition of the Old South into a new environment, where little or no place was left for the old beliefs, traditions and brooding over the past in general. The Sartoris family grounded just on these constituents, neither of its four generations managed to change their attitude, instead they assumed apparent burdens of the legend they were about to be part of, being aware its consequences (Hoffman 46) and leading the family from the gleaming top to the inevitable erosion and dissolution in the legend itself.

#### **4.2. The Compson Family**

Shortly after *Sartoris*, in the same year, so to say, Faulkner handed a manuscript of another novel dealing with history of a prominent Yoknapatawpha family to his friend and literary agent in New York, Ben Wasson. Although Faulkner first "did not believe that anyone would publish it; [he] had no definite plan to submit it to anyone" (*Selected Letters, SF* 212), when handing it to Wasson he talked of it in glowing terms: "Read this one, Bud [...] It's a real son of a bitch. [...] This one's the greatest I'll ever write. Just read it" (*Selected Letters, SF* 215). His initial seemingly over-positive remarks and excessive anticipations about the text eventually proved to be true, because, a few weeks later, it was published by Cape &

Smith under the name of *The Sound and the Fury* (here in citations referred to as "*SF*"), which many critics consider the greatest American example of the stream-of-consciousness novel (Hoffman 44).

Nonetheless, it was the modernistic technique Faulkner used that made the novel seem difficult for his readers in the time of its publication. In the first chapter of the novel Faulkner starts to describe the story of the Compsons through the eyes of Benjy, the youngest son, who is severely retarded. Although he is thirty-three, he can express himself merely by inarticulate moans and cries, and readers follow only his inner monologue, his stream of consciousness. Moreover:

he cannot abstract or generalize, cannot distinguish between one time and another, [...] a thirty-year difference in time is no difference at all, and sensations that are actually separated by twenty or thirty years are undifferentiated. (Hoffman 53)

Cleanth Brooks believes that Faulkner deliberately begun with the most incoherent of the four parts of the novel (each told by a different member of the family), presenting his reader with a puzzle to unravel rather than a narrative exposition of the general situation (45). For example, in this excerpt, Benjy remembers going to sleep the day when his father died in 1912, then a view from his father's funeral comes to his mind and, finally, in the present of 1928, he begs his caretaker Luster for a ball to play with:

Dilsey pushed me and I got in the bed, where Luster already was. He was asleep. Dilsey took a long piece of wood and laid it between Luster and me. 'Stay on your side now.' Dilsey said. 'Luster little, and you dont want to hurt him.'  
*You cant go yet, T.P. said. Wait.*  
We looked around the corner of the house and watched the carriages go away.



'Now.' T.P. said. He took Quentin up and we ran down to the corner of the fence and watched them pass. 'There he go.' T.P. said. 'See that one with the glass in it. Look at him. He laying in there. See him.'

*Come on, Luster said, I going to take this here ball down home, where I wont lose it. Naw, sir, you cant have it. If them men sees you with it, they'll say you stole it. Hush up, now. You cant have it. What business you got with it. You cant play no ball. (SF 20)*

Even though readers probably get confused when reading the first chapter of the novel, it introduces them perfectly into Benjy's curiously fixed world and enables them to actually participate in his experience of time and reality. This way, when they overcome initial difficulties of the stream-of-consciousness narrative, Faulkner lets readers immerse in the family situation, so that they get to know what are the other members like and, generally, what it feels like to live in the Compson household.

Brian Lee suggests that its substantial plot is what differentiates *The Sound and the Fury* from other stream-of-consciousness literature. Beginning in the author's mind just as an "image of the muddy seat of a little girl's drawers in a pear tree" (Faulkner, qtd. in Lee, 231), it gradually evolved into a rich and complicated interpretation of events concerning the decline of the once great Compson family at the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>8</sup>. The little girl in the tree is Caddy, whose life and its consequences determine almost everything that happens in the novel. Lee emphasizes that, in a declining aristocratic Southern family, headed by a gentle but ineffectual man with a neurasthenic wife, Caddy is the only

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<sup>8</sup> For the Compson family tree see Appendix IV

vital member, surrounded by brothers who are 'dead' in various ways and whose lives are distorted by their violent or neurotic reactions to her sexual growth and activity. Caddy's life, too, is eventually spoiled by her family's inability to accept reality: she loses the man she loves, is made pregnant by another, and marries a third who discards her when he discovers that her child is not his (Lee 231-232). All these facts are told and retold four times from entirely different perspectives by members of the Compson household. In the first three cases, readers find themselves within the minds of the three brothers – Benjy, Quentin, and Jason – and adjust to their perspective upon the story and upon the truth of it as each sees it. In Part Four, the perspective shifts from an interior monologue to a straight-forward narrative; the point of view is Faulkner's but the "informing genius" of the section is Dilsey, their African-American cook (Hofmann 50).

These four storytellers convey a great deal about the Compson family and its situation at the beginning of the twentieth century, and from their narrations it is obvious that the peak of prosperity of the Compsons has already passed and the whole family is pushing on toward its decay. However, in *The Sound and the Fury*, the characters' ancestors, the former family history and its more glorious times, are mentioned only allusively. Thus Faulkner, sixteen years after the publication of *The Sound and the Fury*, decided to add information about the origins and the early history of the family by writing the *Compson Appendix* for Malcom Cowley's *The Portable Faulkner*. In a letter to Cowley, Faulkner admitted that he should have done this when he wrote the book: "Then the whole thing would have fallen into pattern like a jigsaw puzzle when the

magician's wand touched it" (Faulkner qtd. in *Compson Appendix*, SF 224).

Generally, the *Compson Appendix* reveals, through brief but profound descriptions of Compson progenitors and their descendants, the rise and fall of the Compsons, who initially moved from Scotland to the United States to begin a new lineage there. On her webpage, Masako Ono notes that Faulkner does not mention the very founder of the Compsons, but he starts with the description of Quentin MacLachan, an orphaned son of a Glasgow printer, who fled from Scotland in 1746, settled down in Carolina and, later, because he did not want to get involved in the War of Independence, moved to Kentucky. However, he did not manage to establish a settlement there, because the land was already taken by other colonists. It was his grandson, Jason Lycurgus, who, after coming to the area later known as Yoknapatawpha County "one day in 1811 with a pair of fine pistols and one meagre saddlebag on a small lightwaisted but strongshocked mare" (*Compson Appendix*, SF 227), traded a racehorse to Ikkemotubbe, a Chickasaw Indian chief, for the "Compson Mile", a solid square mile of land which later became the center of Jefferson. Thus, Ono explains, he acquired land symbolizing material prosperity, which signifies that he satisfied one of the conditions for being a Southern aristocrat-planter. His son, Governor Quentin MacLachan (named after his great-grandfather) fulfilled another such condition by gaining degrees and honor in Jefferson administration. He established the central position of the Compsons in the community; he is portrayed in the *Compson Appendix* as "the last Compson who would not fail at everything he touched save longevity or suicide" (227).

When the Compsons reached the peak of their prosperity, it was also the beginning of the their decay.

Governor Quentin MacLachan's son, brigadier Jason Lycurgus II, fought in the Civil War for the Confederacy and, because of his defeat in the war, he lost some of the "Compson Domain" that had been acquired in three generations. He was forced to put a mortgage on the first square mile of the Domain and he "spent the next forty years selling fragments of it off to keep up the mortgage on the remainder" (*Compson Appendix, SF 228*).

With Jason Lycurgus II, Faulkner proceeds from the family's early, more or less glorious, history onto his descendants who are actually the main characters of *The Sound and the Fury*. Although living at the beginning of the twentieth century, almost all of them are still very much bound with the past, which is, as in the case with the Sartoris, ultimately fatal for them. Moreover, each member of the Compson family actually represents a different relationship to their history, and in order to be able to compare it with history of the Old South, a comment should be made about at least the most significant of them.

As was mentioned above, the youngest Compson child, Benjy, narrates the first section of the novel. Due to his severe mental retardation, he has no concept of time and he can only associate the images of his daily existence, such as the golf course and fencepost, with other occurrences of those images in the past. According to Brian Phillips and Evan Johnson, Benjy's distorted perspective conveys Faulkner's idea that the past lives on to haunt the present. Benjy's condition allows Faulkner to introduce the Compsons' struggle to reconcile their present with a past they cannot escape. Besides, the unique narrative voice provides an unbiased introduction to Quentin's equally difficult section, in which Quentin struggles with his own

distorted vision of a past that eventually overwhelms and destroys him.

Namely, the oldest of the Compson children, Quentin, feels an inordinate burden of responsibility to live up to the family's past greatness and prestige. He is a very intelligent and sensitive young man, but is paralyzed by his obsession with Caddy and his preoccupation with a very traditional Southern code of conduct and morality. This Southern code defines order and chaos within Quentin's world, and causes him to idealize nebulous, abstract concepts such as honor, virtue, and feminine purity. He is also "in love with stasis, represented variously by the place of the Compson home, by Caddy's virginity, and eventually by death itself" (Hoffman 55). Quentin is so much preoccupied with the past that he does not want anything to change, and this, together with his strict belief in the code, causes Quentin profound despair when he learns of Caddy's promiscuity. Turning to Mr. Compson for guidance, Quentin feels even worse when he learns that his father does not care about the Southern code or the shame Caddy's conduct has brought on the family (Phillips and Johnson). When Quentin finds that his sister and father have disregarded the code that gives order and meaning to his life, he is driven to despondency and eventually suicide. From the above mentioned hints about Quentin's pensive monologue and ponderation about the past can be inferred what Lee claims, namely that it all supports the fact that the decline of the Compson family was, actually, connected to the decline of the Old South in general:

what remains an adolescent's neurotic preoccupation with his own emotions also becomes a critical metaphysical speculation on the nature of Time, linking Quentin's doom to that of his family and beyond it to that of the South as a whole. (232)

Mr. Compson foresees the danger in Quentin's obsession long before it pushes his son to suicide. Phillips and Johnson point out that he tries to calm Quentin by explaining that virginity is just a tradition and code of the old South, and that it ultimately only matters to men who take those traditions and codes too seriously: "Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to the nature. It's nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That's just words and he said So is virginity" (*SF* 71). In a sense, Mr. Compson's insight provides a refreshing alternative to the strict adherence to past traditions that the rest of the Compson family follows. Any hope, however, that Mr. Compson's advice might lead to a turnaround in his son's obsession vanishes with Quentin's suicide, which devastates Mr. Compson and likely contributes to his death from alcoholism not long thereafter.

About Mr. Compson's wife, Caroline Bascomb-Compson, an important quotation occurs several times toward the end of Quentin's section: "if I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother (*SF* 105). Phillips and Johnson assert that here Quentin is reflecting on how little affection his mother gave him as a child and how significant and damaging Mrs. Compson's failure as a mother has been. She complains Consumed by self-absorption and insecurities about her family name, Mrs. Compson showed affection for only one of her children, Jason:

what have I done to have been given children like these Benjamin was punishment enough and now for her to have no more regard for me her own mother I've suffered for her dreamed and planned and sacrificed [...] yet never since she opened her eyes has she given me one unselfish thought at times I look at her I wonder if she can be my child except Jason he has never given me one moment's sorrow since I first held him in my arms I knew then that he was to be my joy and salvation [...]. (SF 63)

Because of their mother's disaffection, Quentin and Caddy formed a close bond as neglected, unloved outsiders, and Quentin developed an inordinately strong attachment to his sister. This bond leads to Quentin's despair over Caddy's promiscuity, which ends with his suicide. Additionally, Mrs. Compson seems to think that her aristocratic social status gives her special privileges in the eyes of God; she only displays selfishness, obliviousness, and materialism throughout the novel. She has discarded and corrupted the values upon which her family was founded, yet still relies on ancestry to justify her position in the world. Although she is obsessed with the concept of family, the greatness of her family history and name, she shows no capacity to love or care for her children, the last hope she has for maintaining her legacy (Phillips and Johnson). To sum up, her negligence and disregard contribute directly to the family's downfall.

Toward the end of the novel, the cold, selfish, compassionless Jason IV rises up to run the family, which eventually leads to the Compsons' demise. "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (SF 109) begins the final two sections of the novel, where Jason explains to the sheriff why he is chasing after Miss Quentin, Caddy's daughter who stole from him money that, actually, belonged to her. Jason is characteristically sarcastic and demonstrates the self-

pitying notion that he is a victim. He resents Caddy for divorcing Herbert Head, which cost him the bank job Herbert had promised. Jason has spent much of his adult life in this way, resentful of others and cruel in return. He is furious that Miss Quentin has escaped with his money, and proceeds to blame her for all the family's misfortune; he also knows that he will never truly succeed because he never takes responsibility for his own failures (Phillips and Johnson). Lee declares that although Jason is himself a product of the old aristocratic ethos, his mean-spirited and cynical materialism is:

a quality that troubles Faulkner throughout his career and later comes to be called 'Snopesism', indicating something completely repugnant in the New South, contrasting with the traditional values of personal integrity, family, and community. (232-233)

Although Jason believes in nothing except the almighty dollar, his rationality is self-defeating and so he, eventually, succeeds in outsmarting himself. Brooks summarizes that Jason, seemingly being completely different from the other members of his family who are still living in the dream of the Old South, he "turns out to be the most deluded dreamer of all, and the greatest of his delusions is the dream itself, which is not attractive but in reality ugly and stultifying" (Brooks 65).

Although a character that is only being spoken about, Caddy is at the center of most of the problems plaguing the Compson children. Quentin is obsessed with her, Jason is vindictive toward her and jealous of her, and Benjy is utterly reliant on her comforting presence. Indeed, despite her young age, Caddy serves as a central force that holds the disparate members of the family together. This loving, unifying presence, however, becomes the root of Caddy's and



the Compsons' demise (Phillips and Johnson). When Caddy's husband discovers that she is pregnant by another man, he divorces her, setting off a chain of events that ultimately ruins the family. Nonetheless, Brooks asserts that it was just the impact of the decaying family situation that made Caddy behave like she did; because she could not find warmth, joy and life itself at her home, she was looking for it somewhere else (Brooks 53). Hoffman indirectly supports this when emphasizing that:

Truth [about Caddy's sin] would seem, therefore, to be a matter of perspective; we are aware not so much of truth itself but a version of the truth, a distortion of it, which must be set right, and eventually is. Above all, Faulkner is saying that any truth is far more complex than it appears on the surface to be. (52)

To sum up analyzing the family's history through its members, Brooks stresses that the it actually mainly represented by the three brothers mentioned above: Benjy lives in a virtual present since his many references to the past are for him indistinguishable from present experiences, Quentin is so completely committed to the past that for him even present events have no forward reference and the third brother, Jason, has repudiated the past, and nearly everything that he thinks and does has a reference to the future. (Brooks 60). Nevertheless, there is no future for the Compsons, just as there is no future for the Old South. Caddy and her daughter have fled the Compson place never to return, and Jason, because of his personality, will never marry, so neither he nor Benjy will have a child to carry on the line (Brooks 74).

To sum up, even though the novel is set in the first thirty years of the twentieth century, many of the issues facing its characters involve old-fashioned, outdated traditions and codes of conduct that are vestiges of the

days before the Civil War, and that do not have place in the modern world anymore. To appreciate the novel's themes, one must view the events in the Compson household as a microcosm of a succession of events resulting, more or less, from the South's defeat in the Civil War. Just as the Sartorises, the Compsons belonged to the Southern aristocracy that met its ultimate decline in the Reconstruction period and the formation of the New South. Phillips and Johnson conclude that, as the Compsons belonged to this aristocracy, *The Sound and the Fury* portrays their inevitable demise; the members of the family fade away because they lead their lives according to outdated Southern aristocratic traditions that are incompatible with the more modern, more integrated South of the early twentieth century. The Compsons are guilty of living in the past and, like many other Southern aristocratic families, they pay the ultimate price of seeing their legacy gradually dissolved by the onset of modernity.

#### **4.3. The Sutpen Family**

The rise and decline of a once great aristocratic family, with a history stretching from the times of the Old South through the Reconstruction period into the beginnings of the twentieth century, was a very attractive topic for Faulkner and it recurred in many novels that he wrote. Although after having examined the fate of the Sartoris and Compson family it might seem that Faulkner wanted the decline of the families to somehow imitate the decline of the Old South, it was not exactly so, an example of which is *Absalom, Absalom!*, in which the story of Thomas Sutpen and his dynasty unfolds.

Published in 1936, in the same year when another novel about the Old South, Margaret Mitchell's very successful *Gone with the Wind*, came out, *Absalom, Absalom!* "was only modestly noticed and even more modestly read; by the 1940s it was out of print, and remained so until 'discovery' of Faulkner by the academic literary community of the 1950s" (Rubin 169). The reason why the novel was not received with much enthusiasm was most probably the fact that Faulkner had once again decided to utilize a specific, even modernistic, means of conveying the story in order not to outline the plot directly, but let the reader discover it gradually together with the main protagonists:

Faulkner's so-called "experimental" technique was never an end in itself; it was always a means toward understanding. Sometimes this made for difficult reading; always it meant that the reader had to get involved in the telling as well as in what was being told. (Rubin 193)

To further explain the difficulty of the novel, Faulkner namely discovered that the best way both to chronicle and to judge history was to let it be discovered and interpreted by an observer, one who would be near enough to it to be involved emotionally, yet distant from it to view it in moral perspective. So he decided to tell a story about Quentin Compson, a 19-year-old member of another prominent Yoknapatawpha family<sup>9</sup>, who was trying to reconstruct the story about Thomas Supten and his progeny from narratives of people who had been somehow involved in it. Such complex structure of the novel might have seemed too difficult and hence discouraging, and so ordinary readers at that time preferably chose the "easier" novel by

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<sup>9</sup> The same Quentin Compson who commits suicide in *SF*

Mitchell. Thus, *Absalom, Absalom!* stayed wrongfully unappreciated for quite a long time, although Rubin assumes that it was a "book which many consider the finest historical novel ever written by an American, and one of the great works of modern literature" (168).

Even though the story is primarily about Thomas Sutpen, Quentin Compson is in fact a chief protagonist, too. Being actually the center of consciousness of the novel, Quentin is the one to whom the story is told by eyewitnesses and others and by whom it is sorted out, understood and, finally, judged. Before being recounted by Quentin, the events that took place up to forty years earlier are at first interpreted or guessed at by three other story-tellers: Rosa Coldfield, Sutpen's sister-in-law, Mr. Compson, Quentin's father, and Shreve McCannon, Quentin's Harvard room-mate. The personalities of these characters and their involvement in the events they talk about color their confessions visibly, the result being:

a triumph of the art of historical fiction: an intensely-felt rendition of an historical experience, passionately created yet free of either evasion or falsification. (Rubin 192)

Through the excellently evolved testimonies that, eventually, shape a complete, coherent and intelligible narrative, the reader gradually receives a picture of the Sutpen's family history and its unfavorable fate<sup>10</sup>. Although the rise and decline of the Sutpens superficially very much resembles that of the Sartorises, when examining closely some essential differences emerge.

Both founders of their respective dynasties came to Yoknapatawpha to fulfill the ideal of the Old South – the

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<sup>10</sup> For the Sutpen family tree see Appendix V

plantation perfection. However, they radically differed in their initial motives of pursuing it. While John Sartoris had already been a member of an aristocratic family and he wanted to continue the family tradition, Thomas Sutpen was originally a poor white youth of a mountain area in Virginia, entirely unaware what it meant to be rich or to want to be rich: "Because where he lived the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say 'This is mine' was crazy" (*Absalom* 221). Nonetheless, his life completely changes when his family moves to the Tidewater lands and Sutpen has his first glimpse of the privileges of wealth. His father sends him with a message to a big mansion of a Southern aristocrat and he is stopped at the front door by an African American servant in full livery who tells him that he must go to the back door, as the front door is apparently intended just for "the masters" to come in:

And now he stood there before that white door with the monkey nigger barring it and looking down at him in his patched made-over jeans clothes and no shoes, and I dont reckon he had even ever experimented with a comb because that would be one of the things that his sisters would keep hidden good. He had never thought about his own hair or clothes or anybody else's hair or clothes until he saw that monkey nigger, who through no doing of his own happened to have had the felicity of being housebred in Richmond maybe, looking [...] at them and he never even remembered what the nigger said, how it was the nigger told him, even before he had had time to say what he came for, never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back. (*Absalom* 232)

This incident at first startles Sutpen and then, after meditating upon it, suddenly and radically changes him forever, from a boy wanting no privilege to a man wanting

all – it is the beginning of the “design”, which he later arrives to fulfill in Yoknapatawpha County. In other words, he starts to pursue a wild ambition of a need to possess power, to be the man who owns the house and the slaves who would tell others to go to the back door.

The design takes him at first to Haiti, where he marries and has a family. But he discovers that his wife has some African-American blood, and because of that could not be “adjunctive or incremental to the design” (*Absalom* 240) he abandons her and their newly born child, leaves the island, and vanishes from sight for some years. Sutpen then reappears, this time in Jefferson in 1833, at the age of twenty-seven, and, once again, he sets about creating his design. He acquires land, one hundred square miles northwest of Jefferson, and, with the help of a French architect and some thirty African Americans brought with him from Haiti, builds a plantation mansion, seemingly following the ideal of the Old South, but, actually just accomplishing his own design.

Then, seeking respectability, Sutpen goes to town in search of a wife who can provide him with that status, as well as be the mother to a son and heir. He comes to town to find a wife “exactly as he would have gone to the Memphis market to buy livestock and slaves” (*Absalom* 42). His choice of Ellen Coldfield, a daughter of a local pious merchant, “is deliberate and unerring, and [...] together with Sutpen’s land and money, her presence as mistress of Sutpen’s Hundred is sufficient to give Sutpen the status he requires” (Rubin 174). From the manner he chooses her, it is evident that, in the pursue of his plan, Sutpen does not seek a wife he can love and cherish, but merely a breeder of children who will perfect the design.

This time the design seems near completion; but, though Sutpen has set aside the past, it returns to haunt him. His son by the first marriage, Charles Bon, becomes a friend of Henry, Sutpen's son by the second marriage, and falls in love with Judith, Henry's sister; and the families are dangerously near being unified in an incestuous relationship.

However, the Civil War, the most consequential event in the Old South history, intervened again and:

when the first Confederate uniforms began to appear in Jefferson, [...] Colonel Sartoris and Sutpen [raised] the regiment which departed in '61, with Sutpen, second in command, riding at Colonel Sartoris' left hand, on the black stallion named out of Scott, beneath the regimental colors which he and Sartoris had designed and which Sartoris' womenfolks had sewed together out of silk dresses. (*Absalom* 80)

Thus, both paterfamilias leave Yoknapatawpha County to fight for the Confederacy, which surely is a courageous and creditable gesture on their part. Nonetheless, the reasons for undertaking such an action vary between the two initiators. While John Sartoris, the true Southern aristocrat and plantation owner, goes to the war because he wants to protect interests and beliefs of the country he lives in, Thomas Sutpen undoubtedly joins John Sartoris from a less noble purpose: because he wishes to protect his investment and the progression of his design, even though he eventually "became a colonel and proved a brave and resourceful soldier" (Brooks 193).

Rubin notes that when after the war Sutpen is urged by his neighbors to join in nightriding activities, he tells them that he is too busy. The proper course of action for the South, he says, is to get back to work and restore its fortune - admirable advice in this instance, but given

not from a feeling for the welfare of the South but because he does not wish to be diverted from his sole and consuming private goal. Sutpen has no wish to get involved in overthrowing the Yankee-enforced Reconstruction government; any government that would keep things sufficiently orderly so that he could concentrate upon his design is presumably acceptable to him (Rubin 172-173).

To get back to the family history, with their father, Henry and Charles together join the Confederate army, and, in the course of the Civil War, Henry ruminates on the relationship between Judith and Charles. He loves both of them, but, having been told the truth about his step-brother by Sutpen, he knows that he must not allow the miscegenation to happen. Thus, Henry kills Charles, his half-brother and closest friend, at the gate of Sutpen's Hundred in 1865, just after their return from the Civil War; then he immediately leaves the county, escaping from law. Beside that, there are other misfortunes that affect Sutpen's Hundred during the war: his wife Ellen dies and his slaves desert the plantation to follow the Yankee troops away, leaving the fields uncultivated.

Thus, once again Thomas Sutpen is foiled, his children killed or in hiding, his estate reduced to nothing, and he himself made to run a crossroads store. He makes two more attempts to restore the family. First, he proposes to Rosa Coldfield, Ellen's sister, that they live together and, if she gives him a male heir, promises he will marry her. However, Miss Rosa's strong-willed character is similar to that of Miss Jenny and so she indignantly rejects him. Since he is getting old and time is running out for him, Sutpen then desperately tries to gain a son through Milly Jones, the granddaughter of his old retainer. Nevertheless, their child is a daughter, and



Sutpen insults both Milly and her grandfather Wash in a dishonorable way:

[Sutpen] looked at the girl on the pallet again and said: 'Well, Milly; too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable' and turned and went out. (*Absalom* 286).

This was the last straw for Wash Jones and he, having been goaded to it, kills Thomas Sutpen with a rusty scythe.

Although after his death the remaining Sutpen's kin continue living at Sutpen's Hundred, they are doomed to their ultimate fall in 1909, when the decaying family mansion is burnt down by Sutpen's Mulatto daughter Clytemnestra. After this disaster, the sole surviving descendant of Thomas Sutpen is Charles Bon's feeble-minded grandson, Jim Bond; but he eventually runs away and is never seen again, thus concluding the decline of the Sutpen dynasty.

From the above description of the unfortunate family history it can be said that it seemingly resembles history of the Sartorises, the Compsons, and the Old South, too. The Sutpens were also at their top in the times before the Civil War, possessing a large plantation, huge mansion and tens of slaves. Then, after the end of the war and in the Reconstruction period, the family got into problems that gradually led to its decline. The similarity with the destiny of the Old South, however, is only superficial. It was not the Civil War, the subsequent pervasion of the North and the change it all brought about that caused the decline, as it apparently was in the case of the Sartorises and the Compsons; instead, the only person responsible for it was, actually, Thomas Sutpen himself.

Namely, unlike that of John Sartoris, Thomas Sutpen's character did not fit exactly into history of the Old South, as he was not at all such a representative

aristocrat-gentleman with a virtuous character. On the contrary, he was:

a strong, ruthless, single-minded man, intent upon setting up his dynasty, and with neither an interest in or even an awareness of the feelings of those with whom he comes into contact in his relentless drive for his goal. (Rubin 172)

Rubin also points out that although Sutpen lived and functioned within a complex and sharply-drawn community, he was not a member of that community in any true sense. He was almost completely passionless regarding the things about which the community felt most strongly, because of the only reason: he had his own private goal and would expend no passion or emotion on anything that did not advance this goal (173). A good example of his showing no sympathy for common beliefs is, as was suggested above, that he obviously did not go to the Civil War to fight for the interests of the Confederacy, but he went there just to fight for himself, to protect his design.

To slavery, another frequently discussed Old South issue, Sutpen did not adopt the typical attitude of Southern plantation owners, too. Instead, although he abandoned his first wife because she had African-American blood, when the dynasty was not involved he displayed no racial prejudice whatever, raising his daughter by a slave right there in the house with his family, and even engaging in public fist fights with his slaves. His insistence upon an immaculate racial heritage for his children was abstract: because in the society in which his design was to be executed, black ancestry was held to be a flaw, he could not tolerate it (Rubin 176).

These characteristics of Thomas Sutpen incline to support the fact that his fate and history of his family do not appear to share much with the destiny of the Old South,

unlike the histories of the Sartorises and the Compsons. It is because:

Thomas Sutpen is not a 'typical,' or even a 'representative' antebellum Southern figure. There is little doubt of that. The abstract nature of his design, the contempt for the community he inhabits, the utter ignorance and lack of feeling for tradition, his very pragmatic attitude towards race (he doesn't share in the prejudice, but because the society is prejudiced he must shape his design so as to keep his dynasty pure white) - surely none of these attributes is characteristic of the Old South. (Rubin 181)

However, Rubin at the same time claims that the story of *Absalom, Absalom!* cannot be separated from its relation to Southern history simply because its protagonist is not typically Southern. "The issue is rather that in the antebellum South a Thomas Sutpen was possible" (182). Although his single-mindedness and ruthless greed were customary in Southern mythology to be attributed to Northern industrial capitalism, Faulkner locates the seeds of future decay in native soil, with Sutpen embodying just those elements that will eventually destroy the society in which he lives and flourishes.

To sum up, history of Sutpen's family described in *Absalom, Absalom!* was somewhat different from the histories of Sartorises and Compsons, although resulting in the same outcome. It was not as much influenced by the events following the Civil War and the Reconstruction period, because the spur for its decline was laid even before the war started. In spite of this, Lee regards "the story of Sutpen [...] a model version of the rise of families [...] [which] is motivated by a desire to impose the inner self upon society" (78). That is completely true in *Absalom, Absalom!*: Thomas Sutpen pursued this, striving to establish

a great dynasty, but by his endeavor he also simultaneously wreaked his destruction. Although that was a story about rise and decline of one family in the Old South, Faulkner intentionally wrote it in such a way that it could as appropriately fit into the times of the New South and into the present day, too.

## 5. Conclusion

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the American South underwent a complete transition of political, social and economical systems. At the outset of that transition was the Civil War, the cataclysmic human event in which the people of one nation confronted each other. After it ended, the plantation system based on slave labor was gone, the landscape, towns and cities were destroyed, and people startled, still not believing how such a terrible thing could have happened. In the Reconstruction era that followed the Civil War, with the introduction of new legislature and other various reforms, the Old South gradually ceased to exist. However, in the minds of the people who had lived in the antebellum South, it left an imprint so strong, that, by remembering and narrating stories about it, the Old South became a myth.

William Faulkner, although born at the end of the nineteenth century, still had such a myth around him when he was growing up. The members of his family were a great resource of stories about the Old South, and Faulkner did not hesitate to use them as an inspiration. Creating the unique world of Yoknapatawpha County, he focused on histories of its families, projecting in them what he had been told about the Old South and trying to establish his own view of history and how the Civil War and the Reconstruction period affected it.

On the histories of the three Yoknapatawpha families dealt with in this thesis, it is evident that they quite resemble the fate of the Old South. All three dynasties thrived before the Civil War and gradually found their decline after it. From that, it could be concluded that Faulkner considered the Civil War and the northern interference the main culprits of the subsequent decline.

However, although the family histories of the Sartorises and Compsons confirm that, the reason for the dissolution of the Sutpen family was different. Faulkner was writing primarily not about history, but, actually, about people: "It was people and their deeds – not historical events or sociological observations – who are in Faulkner's focus" (Škvorecký 176, my translation)<sup>11</sup>. In the case of the Sutpens, it was not the change, the transition of the Old South into the New South what caused the decline. Instead, its origin lay long before them, in the human heart of Thomas Sutpen himself, despite it having been a Southern one. Thus, one cannot simplify Faulkner's view of the Southern past to saying that, for the erosion of the families, he blamed the change that the Civil War and transition of the Old South brought about.

In his works, Faulner wanted to describe the "universal experience of humankind". His main focus were people, and, in an interview, he pointed out that "history is the work of men and we should thus learn all we can from it. It always has its uses" (Faulkner, qtd. in Millgate, *Faulkner and History* 39). He showed that human fate comes from people themselves, and that, actually, a Thomas Sutpen was "possible" in the Old South, as well as he is possible in the present, too. Faulkner is not optimistic about the morality nor about the fate of individual human beings: his characters are often slaves of history, of the past that eventually defeats them. However, in the interview, he showed that he had absolute faith in the future of the human race, continuing: "But we aren't specifically

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<sup>11</sup> Lidé a jejich počínání – nikoli historické události nebo sociologická pozorování – jsou v ohnisku Faulknerova zájmu

concerned with [history], though it is always around us. Mankind was in the past, and is in the present and will be in the future."

## 6. Resumé

Ačkoli to tak nevypadá, termín „americký Jih“ se nepoužívá jen výhradně k geografickému vyznačení oblasti jihu Spojených států amerických. Je to termín, který vyjadřuje i svéráznou jižanskou kulturu a společnost. Díky občanské válce Severu proti Jihu, prošel americký Jih v druhé polovině 19. století významnými změnami. Válka i následné období rekonstrukce s sebou přinesly radikální proměny, které nahradily staré principy, na kterých byla jižanská společnost založena. Zároveň ale také tyto změny upevnily vlastenecké podvědomí Jižanů, kteří postupně svými vzpomínkami přetvořili vyprávění o starém Jihu až do formy mýtu. Ten později inspiroval mnoho amerických spisovatelů jižanské literatury, mezi nimi i Williama Faulknera.

V první kapitole této diplomové práce je popsán vývoj jižanské literatury od jejích kořenů, až po období americké literární renesance. Dá se říci, že jižanská literatura, v podobě lidových příběhů, existovala již před příchodem evropských kolonistů, ve společenstvech severoamerických indiánů, kteří si vyprávěli příběhy například o vzniku slunce, země, obilí, medvědů, či ohně. Po objevení Ameriky Kryštofem Kolombem v roce 1492 začali tento kontinent osidlovat španělští, francouzští a angličtí kolonisté. Ti později zavedli trh s otroky, který způsobil příliv obyvatelů afrických států, a výsledkem tak byl velký „tavící kotel“ všech těchto kultur, a společně s tím i jejich lidových vypravěčských zvyklostí, čímž se vytvořil základ pro budoucí literaturu amerického Jihu. Její první psaná díla byly většinou deníky, dopisy, básně a satiry, například od Williama Byrda II. Pozdější významnou literární osobností Jihu byl vědec, spisovatel, politik a později i prezident Thomas Jefferson, jehož osvícenské myšlenky o podobě amerického státu, základů společnosti a



původu člověka, měly zásadní dopad na politický, společenský a kulturní život amerického Jihu. Mezi další významné spisovatele z této oblasti se řadí i Edgar Allan Poe, který vyrůstal v Richmondu ve Virginii a než začal psát univerzálnější díla, věnoval se také jižanské literatuře.

Občanská válka Severu proti Jihu, která vypukla v roce 1861, skončila v roce 1865 porážkou Jihu. Z kulturního hlediska ovšem poraženým přinesla cennou zkušenost prohry, která byla pro mnohé inspirací. Vytvořily se nové mýty: mýtus pastorální idyly na Jihu před občanskou válkou, mýtus morálního Jihu, který dodržuje za všech okolností mravnost a boží přikázání, a v neposlední řadě také mýtus jižanského agrárního způsobu života jako protikladu k životu na průmyslovém Severu, kam industrializace přinesla korupci, odklon od víry a mravní úpadek. V literatuře vznikl proud zvaný „místní kolorit“, ve kterém se právě tyto mýty odrážely; jeho stoupcem se především soustředili na postavy, zvyky, řeč a místopis určitého kraje. Mezi tyto autory patřili George Washington Cable, Kate Chopin, Thomas Nelson Page a další, nicméně největším zástupcem místního koloritu byl Samuel Langhorne Clemens, neboli Mark Twain, který svými díly uvedl americký Jih do podvědomí celého literárního světa.

V 20. letech 20. století byl žánr jižanské literatury znovu oživen představiteli „jižanské renesance“, mezi které patřili například Robert Penn Warren, Thomas Wolfe a také William Faulkner. Ten, jelikož vyrůstal v početné a významné jižanské rodině, rád naslouchal svým strýcům a tetám vyprávějícím o občanské válce a starém Jihu, což se pro něj později stalo inspirací pro jeho díla. Největší vliv na něj měla postava jeho pradědečka Williama Clarka Falknera, jehož úspěšný a dobrodružný život

právnicka, vojáka, spisovatele a obchodníka, se stal předobrazem plukovníka Sartorise v románech z fiktivního yoknapatawpshského kraje, který Faulkner vytvořil, a na jehož pozadí se odvíjela většina jeho literárních děl. Aby mohl se svými postavami libovolně pohybovat v čase a prostoru, Faulkner používal často modernistické prostředky, jako je například proud vědomí. Jeho literární styl tedy není jednoduchý, nicméně je třeba si uvědomit, že takovéto použití modernistické techniky je vždy metodou k dosažení autorova cíle. V jeho dlouhých souvětích, která se často i vymykají pravidlům větné skladby, se setkává současnost s minulostí, a pokud tímto čtenář pronikne, otevře se mu možnost stát se jedním z obyvatelů yoknapatawpshského kraje a z vlastních očí sledovat rozvíjení děje, který je často mistrně skryt.

V další kapitole této diplomové práce je zmíněna charakteristika proměny amerického Jihu po občanské válce. Starý Jih bývá často idealisticky líčen jako ráj na zemi, místo, kde se udržovaly tradice a kultivované mravy a lidé byli ztělesněním nevinnosti. Základem byla rodina a občanská komunita, lidé ještě žili v souladu s Bohem i přírodou. Nicméně, takovýto ráj byl ovšem vyhrazen především pro jižanskou aristokracii – majitele plantáží a otrokáře. Jejich otroci byli pouhým majetkem a často tak i s nimi bylo zacházeno, jelikož neměli žádná práva. Vedle rozdílného pohledu na otrokářství se mezi Severem a Jihem začaly objevovat další neshody, ať již politické, ekonomické, či kulturní, což vyvrcholilo vypuknutím války Severu proti Jihu. Ta, vedle velkých lidských ztrát, za sebou zanechala zničený majetek, krajinu a města, a přinesla také dobu změn. V období rekonstrukce, které následovalo, musely jižanské státy přistoupit na podmínky Severu, aby byly opět přijaty do Unie, byly v nich

nastoleny nové vlády a zákony. Nicméně, tyto změny také upevnily uvědomění Jižanů o jejich minulosti a zasloužily se o vytvoření mýtu starého Jihu.

Cílem této práce bylo analyzovat Faulknerův pohled jak na tento mýtus, tak na vliv proměny starého Jihu na historii rodin a určit autorovo stanovisko vůči této proměně a obecně vůči celé jižanské historii. K analýze byly vybrány tři rodiny z Faulknerova yoknapatawphského kraje a na nich proveden rozbor.

První z vybraných rodin jsou Sartorisové, protagonisté románů *Sartoris* (1929) a *Nepřemožení* (*The Unvanquished*, 1938), vyskytující se i v dalších dílech. Osud jejich rodiny docela přesně kopíruje osud starého Jihu. Před občanskou válkou se Sartorisům dařilo a její zakladatel, jižanský aristokrat a majitel plantáže, plukovník John Sartoris byl všemi uznávanou osobností. Vyznamenal se jako odvážný velitel konfедераčních jednotek v občanské válce a po jejím konci nezkrachoval, jako spousta Jižanů, ale vrhl se na kariéru stavitele železnic, která ještě více posílila jeho společenské postavení. Naneštěstí, byl to právě jeho obchodní partner v tomto podnikání, kdo ho nakonec kvůli finančním neshodám zastřelil. Román *Sartoris*, odehrávající se na počátku dvacátého století, pak pojednává o potomcích Johna Sartorise. Ti jsou však stále příliš zahleděni do minulosti, což nakonec způsobuje úpadek celé rodiny a její splynutí se samotným mýtem starého Jihu.

Podobný osud potkává rodinu Compsonů. Její členové také dosáhli před válkou Severu proti Jihu významných společenských pozic, ale po porážce Jihu museli část svého majetku zatížit hypotékou, ze které už se nevykoupili. V románu *Hluk a zuřivost* (*The Sound and the Fury*, 1929) je opět vyobrazena rozpadající se rodina, která není schopna

vyrovnat se se svou minulostí ani přítomností, a jednotliví členové rodiny postupně tak přispívají k jejímu rozpadu, protože nejsou schopni vést život v prostředí nového, moderního Jihu. Po rozboru rodin Sartorisů a Compsonů se zdá, že Faulknerův pohled na vliv proměny amerického Jihu je jasný - válka Severu proti Jihu byla zlomovým bodem, od něhož se odvíjel postupný úpadek těchto rodin.

Nicméně, historie třetí rodiny, rodiny Thomase Sutpena, o které pojednává román *Absolone, Absolone!* (Absalom, Absalom!, 1936), se ale tomuto pojetí vymyká. I když je její osud v lecčems podobný se rodinami Sartorisů a Compsonů, kdy také největší rozmach zažila před občanskou válkou, a pak v době rekonstrukce upadala, Faulkner v knize jasně dává najevo, že nevidí ani tak příčinu ve válce a proměně Jihu, ale především v člověku samotném. Zakladatel dynastie, Thomas Sutpen, zapříčinil nakonec svým urputným pronásledováním a budováním svého cíle jeho zborcení. Dělal všechno pro to, aby ho dosáhl, ale oprostil se úplně od lidských emocí, což nakonec způsobilo rozklad jeho rodiny.

Rozbor historií tří yoknapatawphských rodin tedy ukázal, že Faulknerův pohled na vliv proměny starého Jihu není jednoznačný. Válka Severu proti Jihu spolu s obdobím rekonstrukce sice ovlivnily vývoj jižanských aristokratických rodin, Faulkner je ale neviděl jako jediné příčiny jejich úpadku. Byl totiž více než historií zaujat člověkem; tvrdil, že historie je dílem člověka a že by se z ní měl člověk ponaučit. Ukázal, že i lidé jako Thomas Sutpen byli součástí starého Jihu, stejně tak jako jsou součástí přítomnosti. Faulknerova yoknapatawphská sága a vůbec celá historie je fakticky jenom pozadí, na kterém se odehrávají příběhy lidí. Ačkoli Faulkner své charaktery mnohdy nepopisuje optimisticky, má obrovskou víru v člověka a věří, že lidská rasa nakonec všechny neštěstí přežije.

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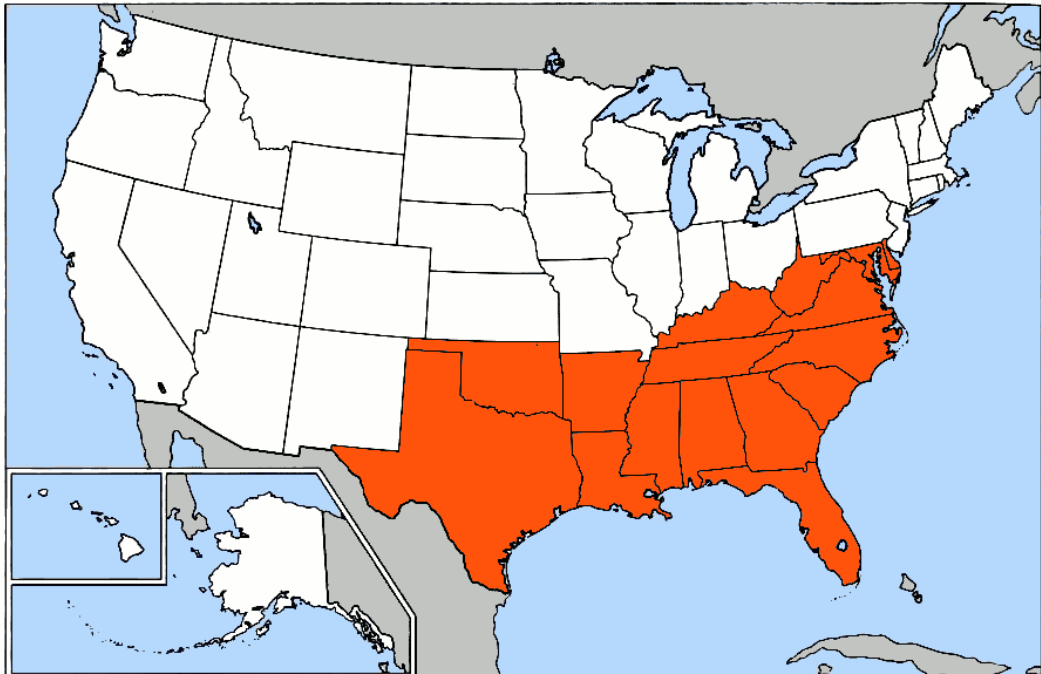


## Appendix I

### The American South

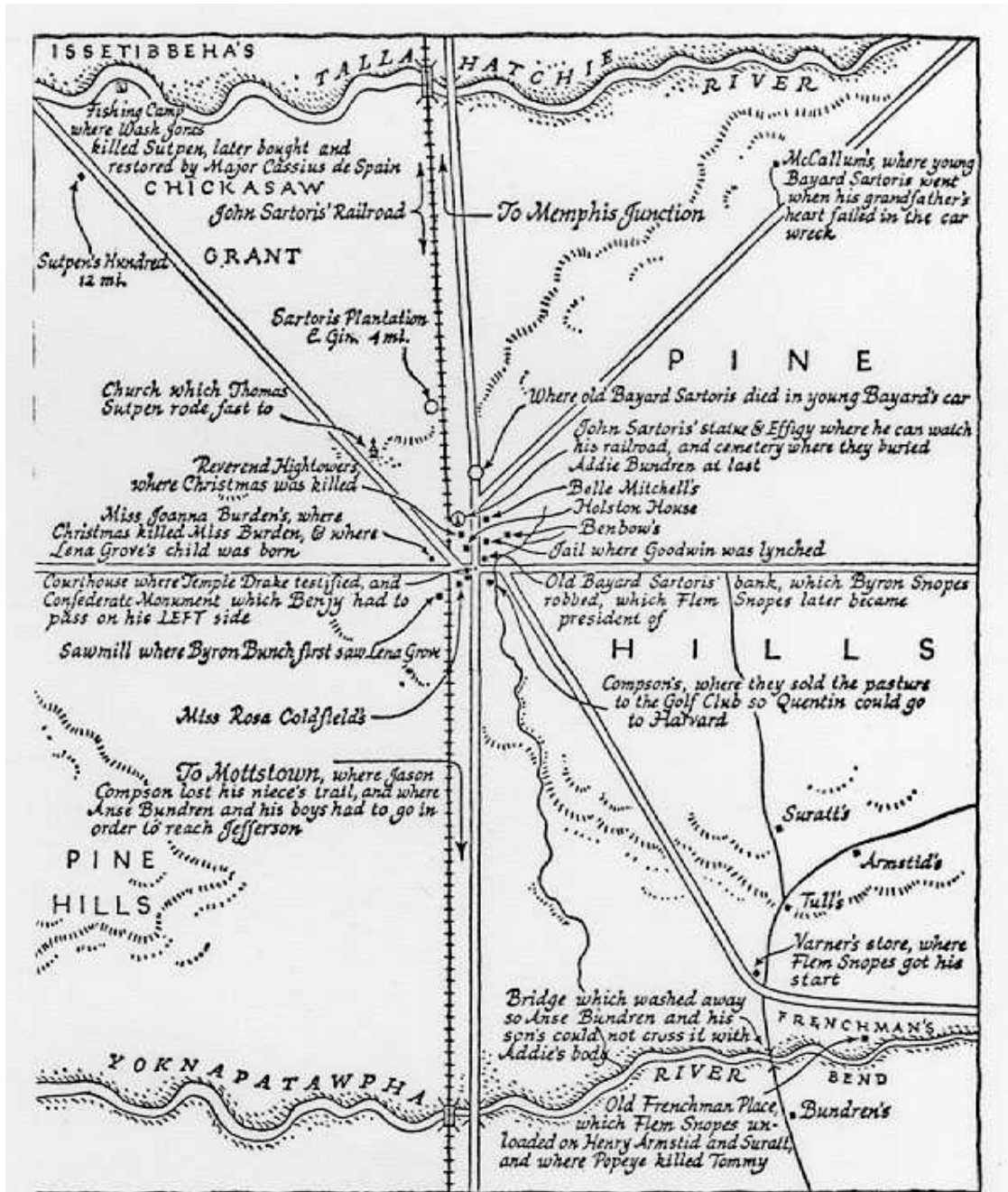
The Southern United States or the South, also known colloquially as Dixie, constitute a distinctive region covering a large portion of the United States, with its own unique heritage, historical perspective, customs, musical styles, and cuisine. There are some overlaps with the Southwest, Midwest, and the Mid-Atlantic States.

The Southern region of the United States includes 16 states, and is split into three smaller units, or divisions: The South Atlantic States, which are Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia (plus the District of Columbia); the East South Central States of Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee; and the West South Central States of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas.



## Appendix II

Faulkner's hand-drawn map of Yoknapatawpha County that he included in his manuscript of *Absalom, Absalom!*



JEFFERSON, YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

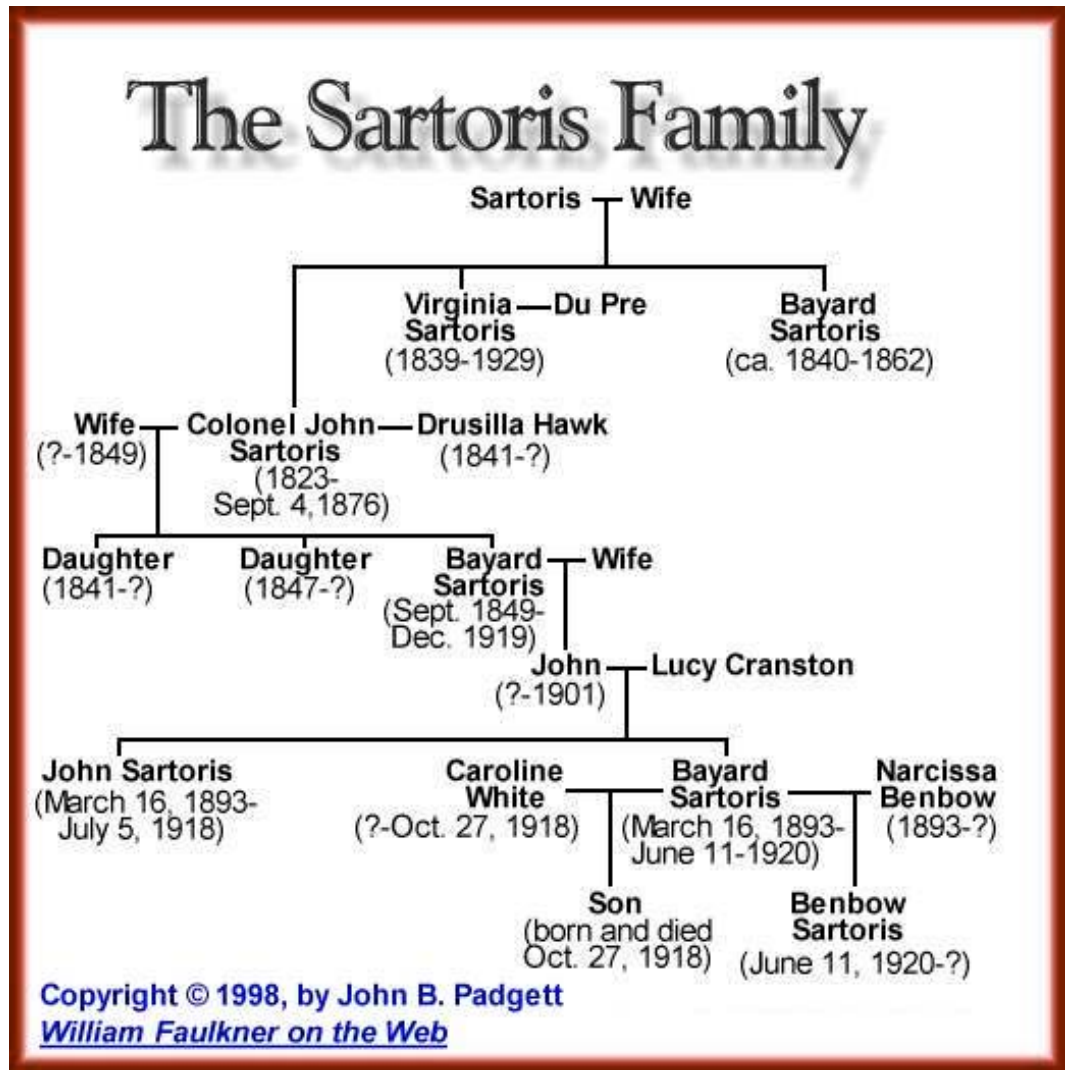
Area, 2400 square miles. Population: Whites, 6298; Negroes, 9313.

William Faulkner, sole owner and proprietor.

(From *Absalom, Absalom!*, New York, Modern Library, Random House, 1951. By permission of the publisher.)

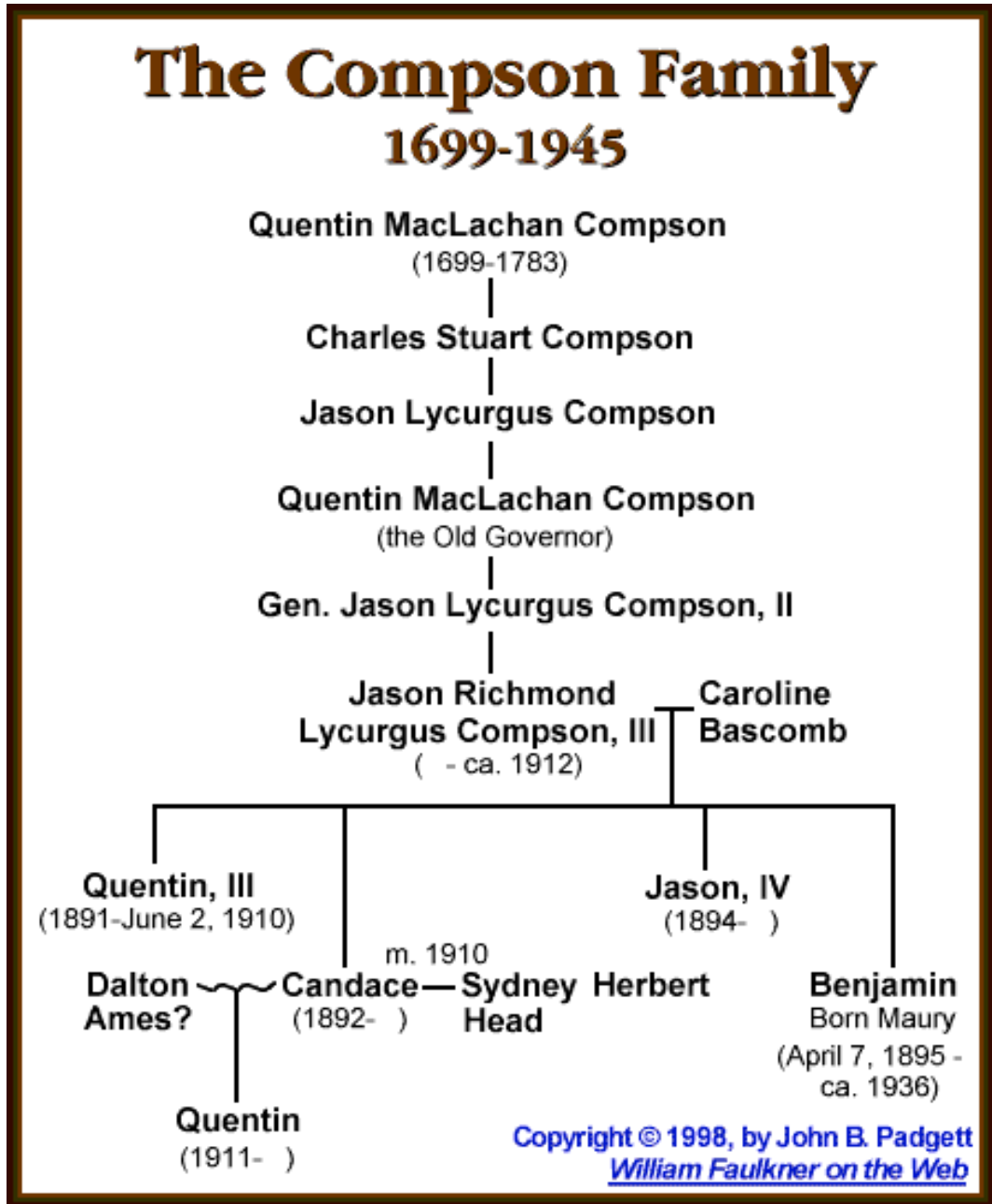
## Appendix III

The Sartoris family tree



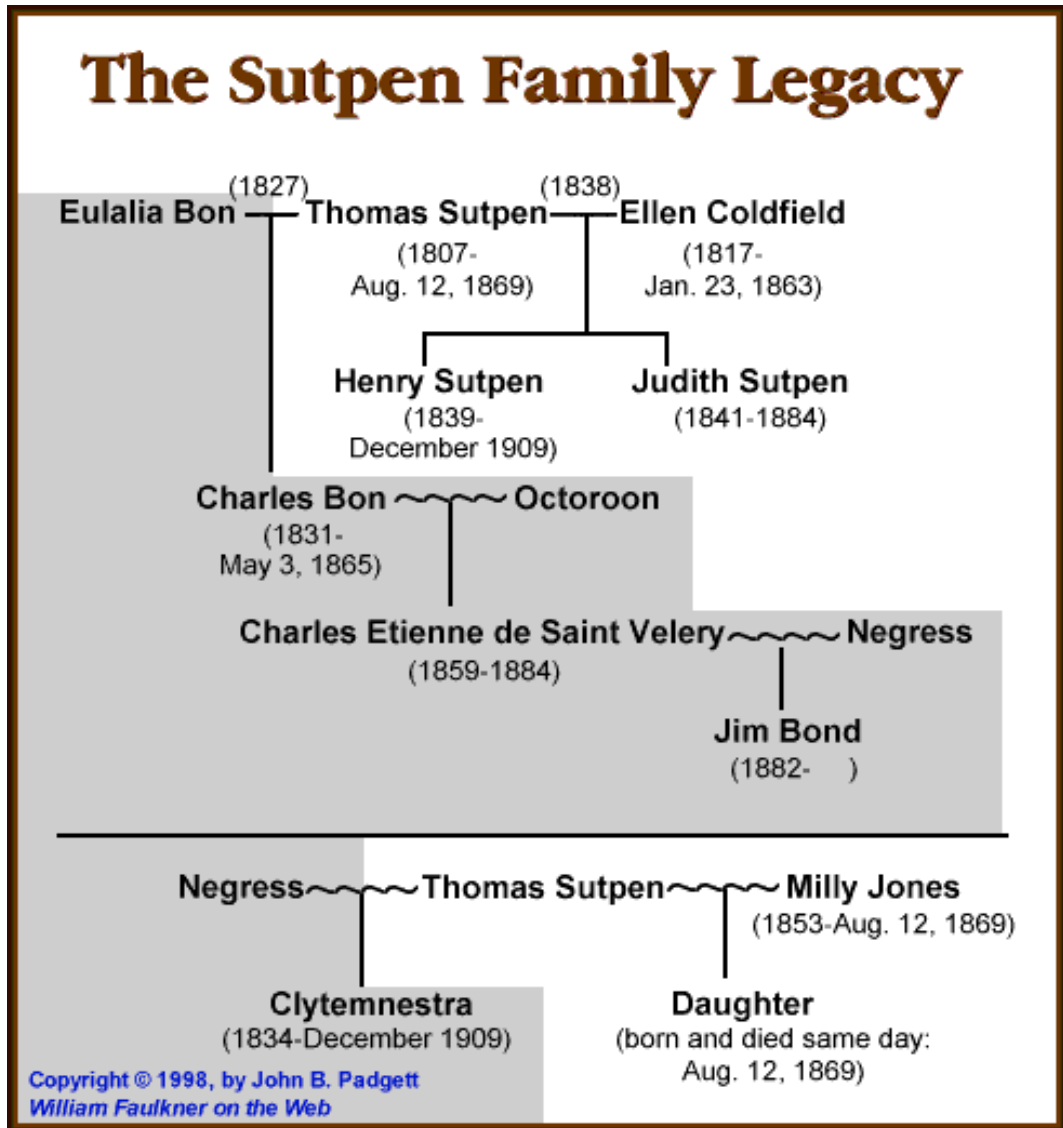
Appendix IV

The Compson family tree



## Appendix V

The Sutpen family tree



## ÚDAJE PRO KNIHOVNICKOU DATABÁZI

Název práce	Proměna amerického Jihu a její dopad na rodiny Faulknerova yoknapawphského kraje
Autor práce	Tomáš Ječný
Obor	Učitelství anglického jazyka
Rok obhajoby	2005
Vedoucí práce	Mgr. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.
Anotace	<p>V druhé polovině devatenáctého století byla proměna amerického starého Jihu doprovázena obrovskými společenskými a kulturními změnami. Zároveň ale díky této proměně vznikl mýtus předválečného Jihu, nostalgicky připomínající časy dávno minulé a idealizující plantážnickou tradici. Tento mýtus inspiroval, mimo jiné, Williama Faulknera, který ve svém fiktivním yoknapawphském kraji promítl jeho vliv na rodiny, kterými tento kraj osídlil.</p> <p>Po úvodu, zabývajícím se jižanskou literaturou a okolnostmi proměny starého Jihu, se tato diplomová práce věnuje rozboru tří vybraných yoknapatawphských rodin: Sartorisů, Compsonů a Sutpenů. Cílem této práce je analyzovat Faulknerův pohled na vliv proměny starého Jihu na historii rodin a určit autorovo stanovisko vůči této proměně a obecně vůči jižanské historii.</p>
Klíčová slova	starý Jih jižanská literatura William Faulkner mýtus yoknapatawphský kraj rodina

